

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

MARK ROBERT QUIROZ,
Plaintiff,
v.
ROBERT A. HOREL, et al.,
Defendants.) No. C 11-0016 LHK (PR)
) ORDER GRANTING IN PART
AND DENYING IN PART
DEFENDANT'S MOTION FOR
SUMMARY JUDGMENT;
REFERRING CASE TO
SETTLEMENT PROCEEDINGS
) (Docket Nos. 267, 291)

Plaintiff, a state prisoner proceeding *pro se*, filed a third amended complaint under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, arguing that prison official defendants violated his federal and state law rights. Defendants have filed a motion for summary judgment.¹ Defendants have also filed a supplemental brief. (Docket No. 290.) Plaintiff has filed an opposition.² Defendants have filed a reply. Having carefully considered the papers submitted, the court GRANTS in part and DENIES in part defendants' motion for summary judgment.³

¹ Defendant Short has filed a separate motion for summary judgment, which has been addressed in a separate order.

² Plaintiff's motion for leave to exceed the page limit is GRANTED. (Docket No. 291.)

³ For the claims upon which the court grants summary judgment on the merits, it will not address defendants' additional argument that they are entitled to qualified immunity.

BACKGROUND

In the third amended complaint, plaintiff alleges that defendants are Institutional Gang Investigators (“IGI”) of the Investigative Services Unit (“ISU”) at Pelican Bay State Prison (“PBSP”). The IGI officers are often tasked with inspecting incoming and outgoing mail. Plaintiff complains that defendants conspired with each other and retaliated against plaintiff for exercising his First Amendment right to file grievances and lawsuits. Specifically, plaintiff alleges that defendants: (1) violated plaintiff’s First Amendment right to be free from retaliation; (2) conspired with other defendants to violate plaintiff’s constitutional rights; and (3) violated state law.⁴ In response, defendants argue that: (1) a portion of the claims are unexhausted; (2) a portion of the claims are barred by the statute of limitations; and (3) defendants are otherwise entitled to summary judgment on the merits, and based on qualified immunity.⁵

The following facts are taken in the light most favorable to plaintiff.

Plaintiff has been confined in PBSP's Secure Housing Unit ("SHU") since February 1992. (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 23.) Since 1991, plaintiff has been an active, validated member of the Mexican Mafia prison gang. (Countess Decl. ¶ 7.) The Mexican Mafia prison gang is responsible for a variety of illegal activity within PBSP and other prisons, and is considered a continuing security threat within the California prison system. (*Id.* ¶ 6.) The Mexican Mafia is also affiliated with other prison gangs and street gangs, and promotes violence as a way of resisting prison officials' authority within prisons. (*Id.*)

On July 19, 2005, plaintiff filed a federal civil rights complaint in *Quiroz v. Woodford*,

⁴ In the third amended complaint, plaintiff also alleged that IGI Correctional Officer Countess violated plaintiff's constitutional right to marry, right to familial relationships, and right to association. However, in plaintiff's opposition, plaintiff states that he is voluntarily dismissing those claims against Countess. (Opp. at 4.) Thus, pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 41(a)(2), plaintiff's claims against Countess regarding the right to marry, right to familial relationships, and right to association are DISMISSED without prejudice.

⁵ Defendants also raised an argument that one of plaintiff's retaliation claims was barred by *Heck v. Humphrey*, 512 U.S. 477 (1994). Defendants have now withdrawn that argument. (Reply at 1 n.3.)

1 No. 05-2938 JF (N.D. Cal.) (“*Quiroz I*”). (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 26.) From 2006 through April
 2 2012, plaintiff filed 59 administrative grievances against IGI officers alleging a variety of
 3 offenses. (Opp. at 37.) In 2007, plaintiff also participated in a staff complaint filed by another
 4 inmate named Sandoval against IGI officers. (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 38.) In 2009, plaintiff
 5 submitted a declaration in support of Sandoval in a federal civil rights complaint against IGI
 6 officers for excessive force in *Sandoval v. Barneburg*, No. 08-865 JSW (N.D. Cal. filed Feb. 8,
 7 2008) (“*Sandoval*”). (Third Am. Compl. ¶¶ 38, 61.) Plaintiff’s underlying federal civil rights
 8 complaint claims that defendants, who are all PBSP prison officials, retaliated against him for
 9 filing *Quiroz I*, participating in Sandoval’s staff complaint, submitting a declaration in support of
 10 *Sandoval*, and filing administrative grievances against IGI officers.

11 The court will set forth more specific facts giving rise to each of plaintiff’s claims below.

12 ANALYSIS

13 I. Standard of Review

14 Summary judgment is proper where the pleadings, discovery and affidavits demonstrate
 15 that there is “no genuine issue as to any material fact and that the moving party is entitled to
 16 judgment as a matter of law.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(c). Material facts are those which may affect
 17 the outcome of the case. *Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc.*, 477 U.S. 242, 248 (1986). A dispute
 18 as to a material fact is genuine if there is sufficient evidence for a reasonable jury to return a
 19 verdict for the nonmoving party. *Id.*

20 The party moving for summary judgment bears the initial burden of identifying those
 21 portions of the pleadings, discovery and affidavits which demonstrate the absence of a genuine
 22 issue of material fact. *Celotex Corp. v. Catrett*, 477 U.S. 317, 323 (1986). Where the moving
 23 party will have the burden of proof on an issue at trial, it must affirmatively demonstrate that no
 24 reasonable trier of fact could find other than for the moving party. But on an issue for which the
 25 opposing party will have the burden of proof at trial, as is the case here, the moving party need
 26 only point out “that there is an absence of evidence to support the nonmoving party’s case.” *Id.*
 27 at 325.

28 Once the moving party meets its initial burden, the nonmoving party must go beyond the
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1 pleadings, and by its own affidavits or discovery, “set forth specific facts showing that there is a
 2 genuine issue for trial.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(e). The court is only concerned with disputes over
 3 material facts, and “factual disputes that are irrelevant or unnecessary will not be counted.”

4 *Liberty Lobby, Inc.*, 477 U.S. at 248. It is not the task of the court to scour the record in search
 5 of a genuine issue of triable fact. *Keenan v. Allen*, 91 F.3d 1275, 1279 (9th Cir. 1996). The
 6 nonmoving party has the burden of identifying, with reasonable particularity, the evidence that
 7 precludes summary judgment. *Id.* If the nonmoving party fails to make this showing, “the
 8 moving party is entitled to judgment as a matter of law.” *Celotex Corp.*, 477 U.S. at 323.

9 At the summary judgment stage, the court must view the evidence in the light most
 10 favorable to the nonmoving party: if evidence produced by the moving party conflicts with
 11 evidence produced by the nonmoving party, the judge must assume the truth of the evidence set
 12 forth by the nonmoving party with respect to that fact. *See Leslie v. Grupo ICA*, 198 F.3d 1152,
 13 1158 (9th Cir. 1999).

14 II. Exhaustion

15 Defendants argue that plaintiff failed to exhaust his claims that defendants IGI
 16 Correctional Officer Countess, ISU Captain Brandon, and ISU Captain McGuyer retaliated
 17 against plaintiff by stopping incoming mail to plaintiff on February 20, 2007 and September 20,
 18 2007, and John Doe III retaliated against plaintiff by intentionally discarding a piece of
 19 plaintiff’s outgoing mail in November 2007.⁶ (MSJ at 14.) Plaintiff’s third amended complaint
 20 is silent regarding whether plaintiff attempted to exhaust these claims.⁷

21
 22
 23 ⁶ Defendants argue that plaintiff failed to exhaust his claim that an unknown IGI officer
 24 retaliated against plaintiff by discarding plaintiff’s outgoing mail in November 2007. (Third
 25 Am. Compl. ¶ 42.) However, plaintiff merely alleges that “John Doe III” discarded the mail. It
 26 does not appear that plaintiff has included this allegation within his “causes of action.”
 Specifically, plaintiff’s claim of retaliation names many defendants, but does not include “John
 Doe III.” Nonetheless, out of an abundance of caution, the court will assume that plaintiff
 intended to include this claim in his third amended complaint.

27
 28 ⁷ Defendants argue that plaintiff’s claim that Appeals Coordinator Wilber retaliated against
 plaintiff by improperly processing plaintiff’s grievance on May 20, 2008, is unexhausted. (MSJ
 at 16.) However, defendants have now withdrawn this argument. (Reply at 2, n.5.)
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1 The Prison Litigation Reform Act (“PLRA”) provides that “[n]o action shall be brought
 2 with respect to prison conditions under [42 U.S.C. § 1983], or any other Federal law, by a
 3 prisoner confined in any jail, prison, or other correctional facility until such administrative
 4 remedies as are available are exhausted.” 28 U.S.C. § 1997e(a). Nonexhaustion under
 5 § 1997e(a) is an affirmative defense; that is, defendants have the burden of raising and proving
 6 the absence of exhaustion. *See Albino v. Baca*, 747 F.3d 1162, 1166 (9th Cir. 2014) (en banc).

7 Defendants state that the prison has no record that plaintiff initiated the grievance process
 8 regarding the February 20, 2007 or September 20, 2007 stopping of mail, or the November 2007
 9 discarding of plaintiff’s outgoing mail. Plaintiff concedes that he failed to file any grievances
 10 exhausting the above three claims. (Opp. at 9.) Because the undisputed evidence, viewed in the
 11 light most favorable to plaintiff, shows that plaintiff failed to exhaust these claims, defendants
 12 are entitled to summary judgment on plaintiff’s claims that defendants retaliated against him by
 13 stopping plaintiff’s mail on February 20, 2007, September 20, 2007, and discarding a piece of
 14 outgoing mail in November 2007. *See id.*

15 III. Statute of Limitations

16 Defendants argue that plaintiff’s claims regarding events that occurred prior to 2007 are
 17 barred by the statute of limitations. (MSJ 17-19.) Specifically, defendants assert that the
 18 following claims are untimely: (1) IGI Lieutenant D. Barneburg, Correctional Counselor
 19 Hernandez, and non-defendant Marquez impermissibly confiscated plaintiff’s personal property
 20 in 2004 (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 24); (2) McGuyer and Countess interfered with plaintiff’s ability to
 21 send and receive mail in October, November, and December 2006 (*id.* ¶¶ 27-35); and (3)
 22 McGuyer and Wilber mishandled an administrative grievance in October and November 2006
 23 (*id.* ¶¶ 8-9, 29-30, 32). Plaintiff responds that the impermissible confiscation of his personal
 24 property in 2004 was not intended to be a claim. (Opp. at 13.) Plaintiff further states that he is
 25 voluntarily dismissing the claims that McGuyer and Countess interfered with plaintiff’s ability to
 26 send and receive mail in October, November, and December 2006, and that McGuyer and Wilber
 27 mishandled an administrative grievance in October and November 2006.

28 Accordingly, these claims are DISMISSED without prejudice.

1 IV. Merits2 A. Retaliation

3 Plaintiff alleges that defendants retaliated against him in the following ways for
 4 exercising plaintiff's First Amendment rights: (1) by stopping plaintiff's incoming and outgoing
 5 letters; (2) by delaying plaintiff's incoming mail; (3) by withholding prisoner declarations; (4) by
 6 issuing a Rules Violation Report ("RVR") against plaintiff; (5) by failing to provide plaintiff
 7 notice that a Superior Court would be seizing his funds; and (6) by searching plaintiff's cell and
 8 removing paperwork. The court will address each incident in turn.

9 "Within the prison context, a viable claim of First Amendment retaliation entails five
 10 basic elements: (1) An assertion that a state actor took some adverse action against an inmate (2)
 11 because of (3) that prisoner's protected conduct, and that such action (4) chilled the inmate's
 12 exercise of his First Amendment rights, and (5) the action did not reasonably advance a
 13 legitimate correctional goal." *Rhodes v. Robinson*, 408 F.3d 559, 567-68 (9th Cir. 2005)
 14 (footnote omitted).

15 The prisoner must show that the type of activity in which he was engaged was
 16 constitutionally protected, that the protected conduct was a substantial or motivating factor for
 17 the alleged retaliatory action, and that the retaliatory action advanced no legitimate penological
 18 interest. *Hines v. Gomez*, 108 F.3d 265, 267-68 (9th Cir. 1997) (inferring retaliatory motive
 19 from circumstantial evidence). Retaliatory motive may be shown by the timing of the allegedly-
 20 retaliatory act and other circumstantial evidence, as well as direct evidence. *Bruce v. Ylst*, 351
 21 F.3d 1283, 1288-89 (9th Cir. 2003). However, mere speculation that defendants acted out of
 22 retaliation is not sufficient. *Wood v. Yordy*, 753 F.3d 899, 904 (9th Cir. 2014) (citing cases)
 23 (affirming grant of summary judgment where there was no evidence that defendants knew about
 24 plaintiff's prior lawsuit, or that defendants' disparaging remarks were made in reference to prior
 25 lawsuit).

26 1. Stopping incoming and outgoing letters

27 Defendants argue that there is an absence of evidence of a causal connection that the
 28 stopping of plaintiff's incoming and outgoing letters was motivated because of plaintiff's

protected conduct. Defendants further argue that there were legitimate reasons for disallowing plaintiff's mail. Plaintiff claims that defendants stopped these incoming and outgoing letters because plaintiff filed *Quiroz I*, participated in Sandoval's staff complaint, submitted a declaration in support of *Sandoval*, and filed administrative grievances.

To raise a triable issue as to motive, plaintiff must offer evidence that defendants knew about the protected conduct. *Corales v. Bennett*, 567 F.3d 554, 568 (9th Cir. 2009). In addition, plaintiff must show “either direct evidence of retaliatory motive or at least one of three general types of circumstantial evidence [of that motive].” *McCollum v. California Dept. of Corrections and Rehabilitation*, 647 F.3d 870, 882 (9th Cir. 2011) (quoting *Allen v. Iranon*, 283 F.3d 1070, 1077 (9th Cir. 2002)). To survive summary judgment without direct evidence, therefore, plaintiff must “present circumstantial evidence of motive, which usually includes: (1) proximity in time between protected speech and the alleged retaliation; (2) [that] the [defendant] expressed opposition to the speech; [or] (3) other evidence that the reasons proffered by the [defendant] for the adverse . . . action were false and pretextual.” *McCollum*, 647 F.3d at 882 (internal quotation marks and citation omitted).

A. June 2008 incoming letter from Yvette Asahi

On June 9, 2008, Countess and Brandon stopped an incoming letter to plaintiff from Yvette Asahi. (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 54.) The reason given for the confiscation was because the letter was considered third party correspondence and used a fictitious name or address. (*Id.*) Plaintiff challenged the stop in an administrative grievance. In the administrative grievance, plaintiff explained that Ms. Asahi lived with her cousin, Vivian Chavez, and Ms. Chavez was plaintiff's girlfriend. In addition, plaintiff asserts that on May 30, 2008, Countess inserted a note in a birthday card that Ms. Chavez sent to plaintiff, and the note stated "you are being advised that any further correspondence that contains perfume such as this will be stopped and you will not receive it. Your assistance informing the author of the correspondence is to your benefit if you wish to continue to correspond with her." (*Id.*) Plaintiff argued that corresponding with people from the same residence was not in violation of any policy. Warden Horel denied plaintiff's administrative grievance. (*Id.*) Plaintiff claims that Countess and Brandon

1 confiscated the June 2008 incoming letter from Ms. Asahi because plaintiff filed *Quiroz I*,
 2 participated in Sandoval's staff complaint, submitted a declaration in support of *Sandoval*, and
 3 filed administrative grievances.

4 In response, Countess states that he stopped two pieces of incoming mail from "Y. Asahi
 5 and Ruben and Yvette Asahi" which originated from Ms. Chavez's address. (Countess Decl. ¶
 6 15.) Countess deemed the mail "third party correspondence" because the letters appeared to be
 7 written by someone other than the person who wrote the envelope, one envelope was postmarked
 8 three weeks after one of the letters was dated, and the two letters seemed to be written by two
 9 different people. (*Id.*) Moreover, Ms. Chavez's address had been identified as a "drop box"
 10 address for communications with plaintiff other than by Vivian Chavez. (*Id.*) Prison officials
 11 prohibit third party correspondence to prevent inmate to inmate correspondence. (*Id.* ¶ 13.) The
 12 IGI officers stop mail as third party correspondence if the envelope and the letter are obviously
 13 written by different people. (*Id.*) The prison has a legitimate security interest in preventing such
 14 correspondence, particularly gang member to prison gang member communication. (*Id.*)
 15 Moreover, the use of "drop boxes" is an unauthorized practice where an inmate sends or receives
 16 mail to an outside address where the mail can be routed from one inmate to another after persons
 17 at that outside address repackage the original mail and send it back to the prison. (*Id.* ¶ 12.)
 18 Because "drop boxes" facilitate inmate to inmate correspondence, mail to or from that address is
 19 generally prohibited to ensure prison security. (*Id.*)

20 Plaintiff asserts that Countess stopped this letter, and Brandon approved the stop, because
 21 plaintiff filed *Quiroz I*, participated in Sandoval's staff complaint, submitted a declaration in
 22 support of *Sandoval*, and filed an administrative grievance on January 2, 2008, challenging
 23 Countess' disallowance of incoming correspondence from an unidentified party (*id.* ¶ 45).⁸ (*Id.* ¶
 24

25 ⁸ In plaintiff's opposition, he expands his claim by alleging that Countess retaliated against
 26 him because plaintiff filed not only the January 2008 grievance regarding stopped mail, but also
 27 ten additional grievances against IGI/ISU officers. (Opp. at 21.) However, plaintiff improperly
 28 raises these theories for the first time in his opposition. As such, these new allegations will not
 be considered. *See Pickern v. Pier 1 Imports Inc.*, 457 F.3d 963, 968-69 (9th Cir. 2006)
 (affirming a district court's refusal to consider at the summary judgment stage factual allegations
 not pled in the complaint); *Patel v. City of Long Beach*, No. 09-56699, 564 Fed. Appx. 881, 882
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1 54.) However, plaintiff provides no non-speculative evidence of retaliatory motive. *See*
 2 *McCollum*, 647 F.3d at 882.

3 First, there is no evidence that Countess or Brandon knew that plaintiff filed *Quiroz I*,
 4 participated in Sandoval’s staff complaint, submitted a declaration in support of *Sandoval*, or
 5 filed administrative grievances. Plaintiff alleges that he “put the defendants on notice that []
 6 Countess was messing with his mail and was singling out [plaintiff] out of vindictiveness behind
 7 his lawsuit filed against the IGI [officers in *Quiroz I*.]” (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 54.) However,
 8 Countess was not named as a defendant in *Quiroz I*, and there is no other plausible evidence that
 9 Countess knew about *Quiroz I*. Plaintiff also alleges that Brandon knew about *Quiroz I*.
 10 However, Brandon was also not named as a defendant in that lawsuit, and there is no other
 11 evidence to infer that Brandon otherwise was aware of it. Plaintiff states that he gave Brandon
 12 “notice” that plaintiff began having “all of these problems” after plaintiff filed *Quiroz I*. (Third
 13 Am. Compl. ¶ 54.) However, there is an absence of evidence as to when plaintiff gave Brandon
 14 “notice,” and specifically, whether plaintiff gave Brandon notice of *Quiroz I* prior to the June 9,
 15 2008 stopping of Ms. Asahi’s incoming letter.

16 In addition, even assuming that Countess and Brandon knew that plaintiff filed *Quiroz I*,
 17 participated in Sandoval’s staff complaint, submitted a declaration in support of *Sandoval*, and
 18 filed administrative grievances, there is no proximity in time between plaintiff’s filing of *Quiroz*
 19 *I* in 2005, plaintiff’s participation in Sandoval’s staff complaint in 2007, or any specific
 20 administrative grievance against which defendants allegedly retaliated. *Quiroz I* was filed in
 21 2005, approximately three years prior. The 2007 Sandoval staff complaint also occurred over
 22 one year prior to this challenged stopping of mail on June 9, 2008. *See Vasquez v. Cnty. of Los*
 23 *Angeles*, 349 F.3d 634, 646 (9th Cir. 2004) (recognizing that a thirteen month lapse is too long to
 24 support an inference of causality). However, plaintiff’s January 2008 administrative grievance
 25 which challenged Countess’ disallowance of an incoming piece of mail to plaintiff from an
 26 unidentified party occurred close to six months prior to the confiscation of the underlying June 9,
 27

28 (9th Cir. March 19, 2014) (affirming district court’s rejection of plaintiff’s new theory, raised for
 the first time in opposition to summary judgment) (unpublished memorandum disposition).
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1 2008 incoming letter from Ms. Asahi. (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 45.) Though six months may
 2 support an inference of retaliation, *see Coszalter v. City of Salem*, 320 F.3d 968, 977 (9th Cir.
 3 2003), it is usually insufficient by itself to support a finding of retaliatory motive, *see Pratt v.*
 4 *Rowland*, 65 F.3d 802, 808 (9th Cir. 1995). In order to establish a causal link sufficient to
 5 survive summary judgment based solely on temporal proximity, the protected activity and the
 6 adverse action must be “very close.” *Clark County School District v. Breeden*, 532 U.S. 268,
 7 273-74 (2001) (per curiam) (citing cases finding periods of three and four months too long).

8 There is no evidence that Countess or Brandon expressed opposition to plaintiff’s
 9 protected conduct. In addition, plaintiff offers no evidence that Countess’ reasons for
 10 concluding that the incoming mail was “third party correspondence” was false or pretextual. *See*
 11 *Wood*, 753 F.3d at 904-05 (speculation on defendant’s motive is insufficient to defeat summary
 12 judgment). Plaintiff does not dispute that the letter qualified as “third party correspondence.”
 13 Outside of plaintiff’s unsupported assertion that Countess and Brandon were motivated by
 14 plaintiff’s protected conduct, plaintiff has offered no non-speculative evidence to support his
 15 claim that the disallowance of mail from Yvette Asahi was because plaintiff filed *Quiroz I*,
 16 participated in Sandoval’s staff complaint, submitted a declaration in support of *Sandoval*, or
 17 filed an administrative grievance challenging a stopped mail six-months prior. *See Wood v.*
 18 *Yordy*, 753 F.3d 899, 904 (9th Cir. 2014) (“mere speculation that defendants acted out of
 19 retaliation is not sufficient”).

20 Moreover, it is clear that prisons have a legitimate penological interest in stopping prison
 21 gang activity. *See Bruce*, 351 F.3d at 1289. Prison security is a legitimate and neutral
 22 penological interest. *See Stefanow v. McFadden*, 103 F.3d 1466, 1472 (1996) (recognizing
 23 prison security as a legitimate and “compelling” penological interest and upholding
 24 content-based confiscation of book advocating racism and violence). Prison gangs in particular
 25 are a threat to inmate and staff safety, as well as to prison order. *See, e.g., Wilkinson v. Austin*,
 26 545 U.S. 209, 227 (2005). The court must “afford appropriate deference and flexibility” to
 27 prison officials in the evaluation of proffered legitimate penological reasons for conduct alleged
 28 to be retaliatory. *See Pratt*, 65 F.3d at 807. Countess asserts that he stopped the incoming mail

1 because it violated the rule against third party correspondence, and the mail came from a “drop
 2 box” address. Both rules are in place to prohibit prison gang activity.

3 Although the Ninth Circuit has held that “prison officials may not defeat a retaliation
 4 claim on summary judgment simply by articulating a general justification for a neutral process,”
 5 *Bruce*, 351 F.3d at 1289, this is not a case like *Bruce* because here, there is an absence of
 6 evidence that defendants had a retaliatory motive. *See id.* (specifying that a general justification
 7 for a neutral process cannot defeat a retaliation claim when there is also a genuine issue of
 8 material fact as to retaliatory motive). Accordingly, defendants are entitled to summary
 9 judgment on this claim.

10 B. December 2008 incoming letter from Dawn Aguila

11 On December 10, 2008, Countess and Brandon disallowed an incoming letter to plaintiff
 12 from Dawn Aguila. (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 60.) Plaintiff claims that Countess and Brandon
 13 conspired and retaliated against him for filing *Quiroz I*, participating in Sandoval’s staff
 14 complaint, submitting a declaration in support of *Sandoval*, and filing administrative grievances
 15 in January and July 2008. (*Id.* ¶¶ 45, 54, 56, 57, 60.) Plaintiff complains that the letter was
 16 stopped on the basis that the correspondence promoted gang activities. (*Id.* ¶ 60.) However,
 17 plaintiff asserts that Ms. Aguila is not a gang member, had no reason to promote gang activity,
 18 and that Countess and Brandon misinterpreted the contents of the letter. (*Id.*)

19 Countess averred that the letter from Ms. Aguila appeared to promote gang activities
 20 because it seemed to advise plaintiff about current gang activities by using street slang and coded
 21 terms, and appeared to seek direction from plaintiff. (Countess Decl. ¶ 17; Nimrod Decl., Ex.
 22 K.) Also, Countess believed the mail was “third party correspondence” because the letter was
 23 signed by a different person than the name on the envelope and the envelope was post-marked
 24 more than a month after the letter was written. (Countess Decl. ¶ 17; Nimrod Decl., Ex. K.)
 25 Plaintiff does not respond to defendants’ arguments in his opposition and does not dispute that
 26 the mail satisfied the requirements to be labeled “third party correspondence.”

27 Again here, there is no evidence of retaliatory motive. *See McCollum*, 647 F.3d at 882.
 28 First, plaintiff does not allege that Countess knew about plaintiff’s protected conduct. With
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1 respect to Brandon, plaintiff asserts that in the spring of 2008, Brandon and other IGI officers
 2 were reading declarations that inmates had submitted in support of *Quiroz I*. (Third Am. Compl.
 3 ¶ 49.) However, it is not clear how this would demonstrate that Brandon would have a
 4 retaliatory motive. In another instance, plaintiff alleges that Brandon approved of the stopping
 5 of plaintiff's mail in June 2008. (*Id.* ¶ 45.) Plaintiff filed administrative grievances challenging
 6 the stopping of his mail, but there is no evidence that Brandon was aware of those grievances.
 7 Plaintiff also cites to specific paragraphs in his third amended complaint in an effort to show that
 8 Countess and Brandon had notice of plaintiff's protected conduct. (*Id.* ¶ 60.) However, the
 9 paragraphs to which plaintiff refers include no factual support demonstrating that Countess or
 10 Brandon knew about plaintiff's protected conduct. (*Id.*)

11 In addition, even assuming that Countess and Brandon knew about plaintiff's protected
 12 conduct, as previously stated, there is no proximity in time between Countess and Brandon's
 13 disallowance of Ms. Aguila's incoming letter to plaintiff on December 10, 2008 and plaintiff's
 14 filing of *Quiroz I* in 2005, or plaintiff's participation in Sandoval's staff complaint in 2007. *See*
 15 *Vasquez*, 349 F.3d at 646. Further, neither Countess nor Brandon were defendants in *Quiroz I*,
 16 and the proximity in time between these events does not lead to an inference that Countess or
 17 Brandon was motivated by any of the protected conduct. Second, there is no evidence that
 18 Countess or Brandon expressed opposition to plaintiff's protected conduct. Third, plaintiff
 19 offers no evidence that Countess' reasons for concluding that the incoming mail was "third party
 20 correspondence" or that it promoted gang activities was false or pretextual. *See Wood*, 753 F.3d
 21 at 904-05 (speculation on defendant's motive is insufficient to defeat summary judgment).
 22 Though the timing between plaintiff's January and June 2008 administrative grievances with the
 23 December 10, 2008 stopping of Ms. Aguila's letter may support an inference of retaliation, *see*
 24 *Coszalter*, 320 F.3d at 977, by itself, timing is usually insufficient to support a finding of
 25 retaliatory motive, *see Pratt*, 65 F.3d at 808. Outside of plaintiff's unsupported assertion that
 26 Countess and Brandon were motivated by plaintiff's protected conduct, plaintiff has offered no
 27 other non-conclusory evidence to support his claim that the disallowance of mail from Ms. Aguila
 28 was "because of" plaintiff's protected conduct.

1 In addition, there is an absence of evidence that the stopping of this letter did not
 2 reasonably advance a legitimate penological goal. Again, it is clear that prisons have a
 3 legitimate penological interest in stopping prison gang activity. *Bruce*, 351 F.3d at 1289. The
 4 court must “afford appropriate deference and flexibility” to prison officials in the evaluation of
 5 proffered legitimate penological reasons for conduct alleged to be retaliatory. *See Pratt*, 65 F.3d
 6 at 807. Countess asserts that he stopped the incoming mail because it violated the rule against
 7 third party correspondence and appeared to promote gang activities. Plaintiff does not dispute
 8 that the letter violated the rule against third party correspondence.

9 Accordingly, defendants are entitled to summary judgment on this claim.

10 C. October 2009 incoming mail from Lorie Quiroz

11 On October 12, 2009, IGI Correctional Officer G. Pimentel and Brandon stopped
 12 incoming correspondence from plaintiff’s niece, Lorie Quiroz, on the basis that it was gang-
 13 related. (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 70; Nimrod Decl., Ex. O.) The mail contained one letter and forty
 14 embossed envelopes. (Nimrod Decl. ¶ 21, Ex. O.) Plaintiff claims that Ms. Quiroz does not
 15 have an arrest record, nor does she engage in gang activities, and thus, plaintiff believed that the
 16 investigators misinterpreted the contents of her letter. (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 70.) At the second
 17 level of review, the response indicated that Ms. Quiroz’s letter was investigated. (Nimrod Decl.,
 18 Ex. O.) The response concluded that the letter contained a small amount of gang-related
 19 information, i.e., information about a gang affiliate. (*Id.*) However, in the interest of keeping
 20 gang-related information from gang affiliates, the specific contents of the letter were withheld
 21 from plaintiff. (*Id.*) After investigation, the letter was disallowed but plaintiff was given the
 22 forty embossed envelopes. (Nimrod Decl. ¶ 21.)

23 Defendants are entitled to summary judgment on this retaliation claim because there is an
 24 absence of evidence that Pimentel and Brandon’s actions were “because of” plaintiff’s protected
 25 conduct. Here, plaintiff argues that defendants stopped the incoming letter from Ms. Quiroz
 26 because they were retaliating against plaintiff for filing *Quiroz I*, participating in Sandoval’s staff
 27 complaint, submitting a declaration in support of *Sandoval*, and filing seven administrative
 28 grievances from January 2, 2008 through October 12, 2009. (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 70.)

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1 First, plaintiff does not provide evidence that Pimentel even knew about plaintiff's
 2 protected conduct. Similarly, in addition to the previous times plaintiff alleged that Brandon had
 3 "notice" (*Id.* ¶ 60), plaintiff refers to three more paragraphs within his third amended complaint
 4 in which he claims that Brandon had "notice" of plaintiff's filing of grievances. (*Id.* ¶¶ 60, 68,
 5 69.) However, in two of those paragraphs, the evidence merely demonstrates that Brandon
 6 approved of the stopping of plaintiff's mail in December 2008 and October 2009. (*Id.* ¶¶ 60,
 7 69.) That is, plaintiff filed administrative grievances challenging Brandon's stoppage of
 8 plaintiff's mail, but there is no evidence that Brandon was aware of those grievances. The
 9 remaining paragraph in which plaintiff alleges he gave notice to Brandon is conclusory, wholly
 10 unsupported, and fails to demonstrate how Brandon knew about plaintiff's protected conduct.
 11 (*Id.* ¶ 68.) Thus, there is an absence of evidence that defendants were motivated to stop Ms.
 12 Quiroz's letter "because of" plaintiff's protected conduct.

13 Moreover, there is no proximity in time between Pimentel and Brandon's stoppage of
 14 Ms. Quiroz's incoming mail to plaintiff on October 12, 2009 and plaintiff's filing of *Quiroz I* in
 15 2005 or plaintiff's participation in Sandoval's staff complaint in 2007. *See McCollum*, 647 F.3d
 16 at 882. *Quiroz I* did not include either Pimentel or Brandon as defendants, and there is no other
 17 evidence from which to infer the filing of *Quiroz I* would have resulted in retaliation by Pimentel
 18 or Brandon.

19 Even assuming that Pimentel and Brandon knew about the administrative grievances,
 20 suspect timing, without more, is usually not enough to show retaliatory intent. *See Pratt*, 65
 21 F.3d at 808. Here, nothing except suspect timing supports an inference of retaliatory intent. All
 22 of the administrative grievances were filed at least nine months prior to the challenged
 23 disallowance of mail from Ms. Quiroz, except for two: plaintiff's October 5, 2009 grievance and
 24 October 12, 2009 grievance. In the October 5, 2009 grievance, plaintiff was complaining about
 25 being moved because he was trying to help inmate Sandoval with *Sandoval*. (Third Am. Compl.
 26 ¶ 68.) There is no indication that defendants Pimentel or Brandon knew about this grievance or
 27 the cell move. In the October 12, 2009 grievance, plaintiff complained that incoming mail from
 28 Rob Ramirez was stopped as third party correspondence. (*Id.* ¶ 69.) Although defendants

Pimentel and Brandon were the officials who decided to stop the mail for investigation, the evidence shows that plaintiff was ultimately given the letter after investigation. (*Id.*; Nimrod Decl., Ex. M.) Without more, the timing of these administrative grievances do not give rise to the reasonable inference that Pimentel or Brandon would be motivated to retaliate against plaintiff.

Moreover, there is no evidence that Pimentel or Brandon had expressed any opposition to plaintiff's protected conduct. In addition, it is not apparent why plaintiff's grievances or litigation efforts would have engendered retaliatory animus on the part of Pimentel or Brandon. *See Brodheim v. Cry*, 584 F.3d 1262, 1271 (9th Cir. 2009) (recognizing that plaintiff must put forth evidence that his protected conduct was the substantial or motivating factor behind defendant's conduct). Finally, plaintiff has not shown that the reasons proffered by Pimentel or Brandon for stopping Ms. Quiroz's letter were false or pretextual. Through plaintiff's administrative grievances, plaintiff was told that Ms. Quiroz's letter contained information about a gang affiliate, which was not permitted. (Nimrod Decl., Ex. O.) The Ninth Circuit has instructed courts to "afford appropriate deference and flexibility" to prison officials when evaluating their proffered legitimate reasons for conduct alleged to be retaliatory. *Pratt*, 65 F.3d at 807. Plaintiff has not controverted defendants' evidence.

Accordingly, defendants are entitled to summary judgment on this claim.

D. January 2010 outgoing mail to Veronica Rodriguez

On November 26, 2009, inmate Frank Fernandez's father died. Fernandez told plaintiff about the death, and plaintiff told Fernandez that he would send Fernandez's sister, Elaine Samaniego, \$200 to buy flowers and help with funeral expenses. (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 71.) On January 3, 2010, plaintiff wrote to his friend, Veronica Rodriguez, to ask her to send \$200 to Ms. Samaniego. (*Id.* ¶ 72.) On January 5, 2010, Pimentel and McGuyer stopped the letter because it violated the rule of "funds enclosed in correspondence." (*Id.* ¶ 73.) At the second level of review, plaintiff alleges that Sgt. Dornback improperly added new reasons for confiscating the letter. (*Id.*) After plaintiff complained that Dornback added new reasons for confiscating the letter, Dornback and Warden Lewis filed an amended second level of review response. (*Id.*)

1 Plaintiff claims that Pimentel and McGuyer conspired and retaliated against him by
 2 confiscating plaintiff's outgoing letter to Ms. Rodriguez that asked her to send money to Ms.
 3 Samaniego. Plaintiff also alleges that Dornback furthered the retaliation by conducting a sham
 4 investigation. Plaintiff asserts that Pimentel, McGuyer, and Dornback retaliated against plaintiff
 5 for filing *Quiroz I*, participating in Sandoval's staff complaint, submitting a declaration in
 6 support of *Sandoval*, and filing eight administrative grievances from January 2, 2008 through
 7 October 26, 2009. (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 73.)

8 A review of the record shows that, at the second level of review, it was determined that
 9 Ms. Samaniego was identified as being the sister of inmate Frank Fernandez, who was a
 10 validated Mexican Mafia prison gang associate. (Nimrod Decl., Ex. Q.) The reviewer
 11 concluded that it was reasonable to find that plaintiff's request for the \$200 was intended to be
 12 used "for or on behalf of Fernandez," who was an inmate, which violated the California Code of
 13 Regulations.⁹ (*Id.*) Further, the reviewer concluded that the outgoing letter violated PBSP
 14 policies against circumventing CDCR policies and procedures, and third party correspondence.
 15 (*Id.*) At the director's level of review, the appeals examiner agreed with the second level of
 16 review response, and added that because plaintiff's letter to Ms. Rodriguez was sent on January
 17 5, 2010, more than one month after the death of Frank Fernandez's father, it was reasonable to
 18 conclude that the money was not intended for flowers or funeral expenses, but rather as a means
 19 to transfer money from one inmate to another. (*Id.*)

20 Here, plaintiff's claim fails because of an absence of evidence of retaliatory motive. *See*
 21 *McCollum*, 647 F.3d at 882. There is no evidence that Pimentel knew about plaintiff's protected
 22 conduct. As for McGuyer and Dornback, plaintiff asserts that they had "notice" of "retaliation
 23 and misconduct," but the evidence does not lead to such an inference. (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 73,
 24 citing ¶¶ 45, 49, 54, 56, 57, 60, 66, 69, 70.) Moreover, in none of the paragraphs to which

26 ⁹ "Funds may be mailed to an inmate in the form of a money order, certified check, personal
 27 check, or any other negotiable means except cash and travelers checks. Funds from other
 28 inmates/parolees shall be only accepted from approved correspondents . . . who are members of
 the same family, or the parent of the inmate's children." Cal. Code Regs., tit. 15, § 3140(a)(2)
 (2009).

1 plaintiff cites in support of his assertion does plaintiff mention McGuyer or Dornback, much less
 2 provide evidence that McGuyer or Dornback had knowledge of plaintiff's protected conduct.

3 Further, as discussed previously, there is no proximity in time between defendants'
 4 alleged retaliatory conduct and plaintiff's filing of *Quiroz I* in 2005, plaintiff's participation in
 5 Sandoval's staff complaint in 2007, or plaintiff's 2009 declaration in support of *Sandoval*.
 6 Pimentel, McGuyer, and Dornback were not named as defendants in *Quiroz I* or in *Sandoval*.
 7 The administrative grievances closest in proximity in time were filed approximately three
 8 months prior to the challenged confiscation of mail. However, even assuming that a three month
 9 gap is sufficient to show suspect timing, without more, it is usually not enough to show
 10 retaliatory intent. *See Pratt*, 65 F.3d at 808. In other words, the proximity in time between these
 11 events does not lead to an inference that Pimentel, McGuyer, or Dornback was substantially
 12 motivated by any of the protected conduct. *See Huskey v. City of San Jose*, 204 F.3d 893, 899
 13 (9th Cir. 2000) (retaliation claim cannot rest on the logical fallacy of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*,
 14 i.e., "after this, therefore because of this"). Second, there is no evidence that Pimentel,
 15 McGuyer, or Dornback expressed opposition to the protected conduct. Third, plaintiff offers no
 16 specific evidence that the defendants' reasons for concluding that plaintiff's outgoing mail was
 17 an improper attempt to send inmate Frank Fernandez money was false or pretextual. *See Wood*,
 18 753 F.3d at 904-05 (speculation on defendant's motive is insufficient to defeat summary
 19 judgment). Here, at the director's level of review, the finding that plaintiff violated prison
 20 policies was affirmed by non-defendants, who agreed that the confiscation of plaintiff's outgoing
 21 mail was proper. (Nimrod Decl., Ex. Q.) Outside of plaintiff's unsupported assertion that
 22 Pimentel, McGuyer, and Dornback were motivated to confiscate this letter because of plaintiff's
 23 protected conduct, plaintiff has offered no non-conclusory evidence to support his claim.

24 In addition, there is an absence of evidence that the stopping of this letter did not
 25 reasonably advance a legitimate penological goal. Defendants provided evidence that the letter
 26 was stopped because it was an attempt to provide funds for the benefit of another inmate, in
 27 violation of the California Code of Regulations. Again, prisons have a legitimate penological
 28 interest in stopping prison gang activity, *see Bruce*, 351 F.3d at 1289, and the courts must afford

deference to their evaluation, *see Pratt*, 65 F.3d at 807 (finding that retaliation claims brought by prisoners must be evaluated in light of concerns over “excessive judicial involvement in day-to-day prison management, which ‘often squander[s] judicial resources with little offsetting benefit to anyone.’”)).

Accordingly, defendants are entitled to summary judgment on this claim.

E. November 2010 incoming letter from Yvette Almos

On November 24, 2010, Pimentel stopped an incoming letter from Yvette Almos on the grounds that it discussed gang-related activity in a coded manner. (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 95.) Plaintiff filed an administrative grievance, and also wrote to Ms. Almos asking her if the correspondence that was stopped, in fact referred to other Mexican Mafia members or communicated gang-related activity from the Colton area in a coded manner. (*Id.* ¶¶ 98-99.) In response, Ms. Almos answered that her letter did not do those things. (Alvidrez Decl. ¶ 16.) In the administrative grievance, Sgt. Frisk and Lewis both affirmed that the letter contained coded messages related to gang activity. (Nimrod Decl., Ex. ee.) Plaintiff claims that Pimentel and Frisk retaliated against plaintiff for filing *Quiroz I*, participating in Sandoval's staff complaint, submitting a declaration in support of *Sandoval*, and filing 17 administrative grievances from January 2, 2008 through December 9, 2010. (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 99.)

Again, plaintiff's claim fails because of an absence of evidence of retaliatory motive. *See McCollum*, 647 F.3d at 882. Plaintiff does not allege that either Pimentel or Frisk had knowledge of plaintiff's previous grievances or lawsuit. Moreover, even assuming that proximity in time between the stopping of Ms. Almos' letter and any of plaintiff's grievances is circumstantial evidence of motive, it is not sufficient by itself to lead to an inference that Pimentel or Frisk was motivated by any of the protected conduct. *See Pratt*, 65 F.3d at 808. Second, there is no evidence that Pimentel or Frisk expressed opposition to the protected conduct. Third, plaintiff offers no evidence that the defendants' reasons for concluding that Ms. Almos' incoming mail included inappropriate coded messages were false or pretextual. *See Wood*, 753 F.3d at 904-05 (speculation on defendant's motive is insufficient to defeat summary judgment).

1 At the director's level of review, the findings were affirmed by non-defendants, who
 2 agreed that the confiscation of Ms. Almos' mail was proper. (Nimrod Decl., Ex. ee.) Although
 3 Ms. Almos declares that there was no reference to gangs or gang related messages in her letter,
 4 that she and plaintiff disagree with defendants' stated decision for stopping the letter does not
 5 necessarily demonstrate that the defendants' reasons were pretextual. *Cf. Koutnik v. Brown*, 456
 6 F.3d 777, 785 (7th Cir. 2006) (deferring to prison officials' assessment of what constitutes gang-
 7 related symbols and recognizing that courts owe substantial deference to prison administrators'
 8 professional judgment). Plaintiff's argument that the letter did not include gang related activity
 9 demonstrates that plaintiff disagreed with the accuracy of defendants' decision to stop the mail
 10 from reaching plaintiff. However, plaintiff's argument and Ms. Almos' opinion do not
 11 demonstrate that defendants' decision to stop Ms. Almos' letter was a pretext, or that it was a
 12 pretext substantially motivated by plaintiff's protected conduct. *See, e.g., Diorio v. County of*
 13 *Kern*, No. 11-cv-01569 LJO JLT, 2013 WL 1127687, at *10 (E.D. Cal. March 18, 2013) (stating
 14 that, in the employment context, evidence of pretense must be specific and substantial); *Keyser*
 15 *v. Sacramento City Unified School Dist.*, 265 F.3d 741, 753 n.5 (9th Cir. 2001) (differentiating
 16 between "specific," "substantial" evidence and opinions and beliefs that a defendant's actions
 17 were retaliatory, "based on no specific or substantial evidence"). Outside of plaintiff's
 18 unsupported assertion that Pimentel and Frisk were motivated to confiscate this letter because of
 19 plaintiff's protected conduct, plaintiff has offered no non-conclusory evidence to support his
 20 claim.

21 Finally, there is an absence of evidence that the stopping of this letter did not reasonably
 22 advance a legitimate penological goal. Defendants provided evidence that the letter was stopped
 23 because it contained coded messages. Again, it is clear that prisons have a legitimate
 24 penological interest in stopping prison gang activity. *Bruce*, 351 F.3d at 1289. Although
 25 plaintiff disputes the accuracy of defendants' actions, the court must "afford appropriate
 26 deference and flexibility" to prison officials in the evaluation of proffered legitimate penological
 27 reasons for conduct alleged to be retaliatory. *See Pratt*, 65 F.3d at 807.

28 Accordingly, defendants are entitled to summary judgment on this claim.

1 F. Incoming mail from Burke, Williams & Sorensen

2 On December 16, 2011, plaintiff was subject to a cell search. Frisk and ISU Captain
 3 Freeland stopped and confiscated incoming mail from Burke, Williams & Sorensen. (Third Am.
 4 Compl. ¶ 101.) As a result of the search, plaintiff discovered that documents produced to him by
 5 Short's defense counsel in discovery requests were confiscated. (*Id.* ¶¶ 102, 103, 108.) Plaintiff
 6 alleges that Frisk and Freeland conspired and retaliated against him by stopping and destroying
 7 plaintiff's legal discovery documents from Burke, Williams & Sorensen. When Frisk
 8 approached plaintiff to let plaintiff know that the documents had been confiscated, plaintiff told
 9 Frisk that the documents he destroyed were privileged legal mail that was sent to him by Short's
 10 lawyer. (*Id.* ¶ 102.) Frisk merely laughed and said, "I don't care, I know all about your
 11 conspiracy theory." (*Id.*) Plaintiff claims that Frisk and Freeland retaliated against plaintiff for
 12 filing *Quiroz I*, participating in Sandoval's staff complaint, submitting a declaration in support of
 13 *Sandoval*, filing 53 administrative grievances from October 2006 through December 2011, and
 14 filing the underlying federal action. (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 107; Opp. at 43.)

15 Sgt. Pieren interviewed plaintiff for purposes of plaintiff's administrative grievance.
 16 (Soderlund Decl., Ex. A.) Pieren also reviewed the stopped mail from Burke, Williams &
 17 Sorensen and found two confidential CDCR documents – the first was a "Post Order" or "Duty
 18 Statement" for Short, which included information such as the procedures for how and when IGI
 19 Sergeants respond to institution alarms. (Frisk Decl. ¶ 8.) Such information could be used by an
 20 inmate to disrupt the prison, which "would jeopardize the safety and security of the institution."
 21 (*Id.*; Soderlund Decl., Ex. A.) The second document was Short's work history which included
 22 personal information about Sgt. Short. (*Id.*) The reviewer concluded that, if an inmate were to
 23 possess those documents, it would pose a risk to the safety and security of the institution. (*Id.*)
 24 At the director's level of review, non-defendants reviewed the findings and denied plaintiff's
 25 appeal of his administrative grievance.

26 Plaintiff's claim fails because of an absence of evidence of retaliatory motive. *See*
 27 *McCollum*, 647 F.3d at 882. Even assuming that proximity in time between the stopping of the
 28 incoming letter from Burke, Williams & Sorensen and plaintiff's protected conduct is

1 circumstantial evidence of motive, it is not sufficient by itself to lead to an inference that Frisk or
2 Freeland was motivated by any of the protected conduct. *See Pratt*, 65 F.3d at 808. Second,
3 there is no evidence that Frisk or Freeland expressed opposition to the protected conduct.
4 Plaintiff asserts that when Frisk informed plaintiff that the discovery had been destroyed because
5 they were confidential documents, plaintiff informed Frisk that the documents were evidence
6 from Short's attorney in support of plaintiff's underlying complaint. (Third Am. Comp. ¶ 102.)
7 According to plaintiff, Frisk responded, "I don't care. I know all about your conspiracy theory,"
8 and laughed while Frisk left. (*Id.*) However, Frisk's statement was not an expression of
9 opposition to plaintiff's filing of *Quiroz I* or administrative grievances. At most, Frisk
10 acknowledged that he knew about plaintiff's filings, but awareness and opposition are not the
11 same for these purposes. *See McCollum*, 647 F.3d at 882 (making a distinction between
12 "awareness" and "opposition"). Third, plaintiff offers no evidence that the defendants' reasons
13 for confiscating the incoming mail on the ground that the information was confidential to
14 inmates were false or pretextual. *See Wood*, 753 F.3d at 904-05 (speculation on defendant's
15 motive is insufficient to defeat summary judgment). At the director's level of review, the
16 findings were affirmed by non-defendants, who agreed that the confiscation of the documents
17 was proper. (Soderlund Decl., Ex. A.) In addition, courts in this circuit have concluded that
18 Post-Orders such as the one confiscated by defendants are deemed confidential. *See, e.g.*,
19 *Rogers v. Emerson*, No. 12-1827 AWI, 2013 WL 6383239, at *3 (E.D. Cal. Dec. 4, 2013)
20 (unpublished). Outside of plaintiff's unsupported assertion that Frisk and Freeland were
21 motivated to confiscate these documents because of plaintiff's protected conduct, plaintiff has
22 offered no non-conclusory evidence to support his claim.

Accordingly, defendants are entitled to summary judgment on this claim.

G. April 2012 incoming mail from Vivian Chavez

25 On April 17, 2012, IGI Correctional Officer Healy and Freeland stopped an incoming
26 letter from Vivian Chavez, on the basis that it contained coded messages and promoted gang
27 activity. (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 109.) Plaintiff alleges that Pieren conspired to retaliate against
28 him by conducting a sham investigation. (*Id.* ¶ 111.) Plaintiff refuted that the letter from Ms.

1 Chavez included coded messages or promoted gang activity. (*Id.* ¶ 110.) Plaintiff claims that
 2 Healy, Freeland, and Pieren retaliated against plaintiff for filing *Quiroz I*, participating in
 3 Sandoval's staff complaint, submitting a declaration in support of *Sandoval*, filing 59
 4 administrative grievances from October 2006 through April 2012, and litigating the underlying
 5 federal lawsuit. (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 112; Opp. at 37.)

6 First, there is an absence of evidence that Healy, Freeland, or Pieren knew about any of
 7 plaintiff's protected conduct. As such, they could not have been motivated by retaliation.
 8 Moreover, even though timing may properly be considered as circumstantial evidence of
 9 retaliatory intent, alone it is insufficient to support a retaliation claim. *Pratt*, 65 F.3d at 808; *see*
 10 *Stone v. Becerra*, No. 10-138 RMP, 2011 WL 1565299, *3 (E.D. Wash. April 25, 2011) (timing
 11 of cell search, without more, was insufficient to allege that search was retaliatory), *aff'd* by 520
 12 Fed. Appx. 542 (9th Cir. May 22, 2013) (unpublished memorandum disposition). Moreover,
 13 there is no indication why Healy, Freeland, or Pieren would have any retaliatory animus for
 14 *Quiroz I* or the underlying federal action because Healy, Freeland, and Pieren were not
 15 defendants in *Quiroz I*, and they were not named as defendants in this action until after this
 16 challenged stopping of mail. In addition, plaintiff's participation in Sandoval's staff complaint
 17 and submission of a declaration in support of *Sandoval* appear to have little relevance to Healy,
 18 Freeland, or Pieren because they were not defendants in *Sandoval*.

19 Nonetheless, even assuming that the timing is suspect, there is no evidence that Healy,
 20 Freeland, or Pieren expressed opposition to plaintiff's protected conduct. Furthermore, plaintiff
 21 offers no non-speculative evidence that the defendants' reasons for confiscating the incoming
 22 mail on the grounds that the letter was coded and contained gang-related material were false or
 23 pretextual. *See Wood*, 753 F.3d at 904-05 (speculation on defendant's motive is insufficient to
 24 defeat summary judgment). At the director's level of review, the findings were affirmed by non-
 25 defendants, who agreed that the confiscation of the mail was proper. (Soderlund Decl., Ex. C.)
 26 Outside of plaintiff's unsupported assertion that Healy, Freeland, and Pieren were motivated to
 27 confiscate this letter because of plaintiff's protected conduct, plaintiff has offered no non-
 28 conclusory evidence to support his claim. Moreover, as previously stated, defendants have

1 provided evidence that the stop was intended to prevent gang-related activity, which serves a
 2 legitimate penological purpose.

3 Accordingly, defendants are entitled to summary judgment on this claim.

4 2. Delay of mail

5 Plaintiff sets forth three instances where defendants delayed plaintiff's incoming or
 6 outgoing mail after defendants stopped the mail for investigation. (Third Am. Compl. ¶¶ 69, 81,
 7 84.) In each instance, defendants ultimately concluded that plaintiff's mail did not violate prison
 8 policies, and delivered the mail to the intended recipients. (*Id.* ¶¶ 69, 81, 84.)

9 First, on September 20, 2009, Pimentel and Brandon stopped incoming mail from Rob
 10 Ramirez because Pimental and Brandon determined that the incoming mail contained third party
 11 correspondence. (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 69; Nimrod Decl. ¶ 19.) Plaintiff complained that the
 12 letter was merely relaying a message from a friend or family member. (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 69.)
 13 On or around October 24, 2009, at the first level of review of plaintiff's administrative
 14 grievance, Pieren agreed with plaintiff that the contents of the letter did not violate prison
 15 policies and delivered the letter to plaintiff. (*Id.*)

16 Second, on January 29, 2010, Pimentel and McGuyer stopped incoming mail from
 17 Elizabeth Casteneda because Pimentel and McGuyer believed the correspondence was an
 18 attempt to facilitate third party correspondence or pass messages. (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 81;
 19 Nimrod Decl. ¶ 26.) Plaintiff filed an administrative grievance. Pieren granted plaintiff's
 20 administrative grievance, concluding that "although the wording in the letter could be construed
 21 as trying to establish a third party communication, it in fact did not meet the definition" (Nimrod Decl., Ex. T.) As a result, on March 10, 2010, plaintiff was given the letter. (*Id.*)

22 Third, on March 12, 2010, non-defendant IGI Correctional Officer Puente¹⁰ and
 23 McGuyer stopped plaintiff's outgoing mail to Veronica Rodriguez on the ground that the mail
 24 was an attempt to circumvent regulations and violate the prohibition on contraband. (Third Am.
 25 Compl. ¶ 84; Nimrod Decl. ¶ 28.) Plaintiff filed an administrative grievance. Pieren granted
 26

27
 28

¹⁰ Puente was voluntarily dismissed from this case by plaintiff.
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1 plaintiff's administrative grievance, finding that the outgoing mail did not appear to violate the
 2 prison policies and mailed out plaintiff's correspondence the following day, on March 13, 2010.
 3 (Nimrod Decl., Ex. V.)

4 Defendants are entitled to summary judgment on these claims of retaliation because there
 5 is an absence of evidence as to causation and whether the delay chilled plaintiff's First
 6 Amendment right to file grievances and lawsuits.

7 In determining whether a retaliatory motive exists, a relevant factor includes whether the
 8 defendant was aware of the prisoner's protected conduct. *Pratt*, 65 F.3d at 808. Here, plaintiff
 9 does not proffer facts to show that Pimentel knew about plaintiff's protected conduct or that the
 10 protected conduct motivated Pimentel to retaliate. (Third Am. Compl. ¶¶ 69, 81, 84.)

11 On the other hand, plaintiff asserts that he gave notice to Brandon about plaintiff's
 12 allegations of "retaliation and misconduct" and refers to seven paragraphs within plaintiff's third
 13 amended complaint in support of his assertion. (*Id.* ¶ 69, citing ¶¶ 45, 49, 54, 56, 57, 60, 68.) In
 14 one paragraph, plaintiff alleges that in January 2008, plaintiff told Brandon about *Quiroz I* and
 15 plaintiff's belief that IGI officers have been tampering with his mail in retaliation for the lawsuit.
 16 (*Id.* ¶ 45.) However, there is no evidence to demonstrate why Brandon would be motivated to
 17 retaliate against plaintiff for a lawsuit that did not name Brandon as a defendant. Plaintiff further
 18 asserts that in the spring of 2008, Brandon and other IGI officers were reading declarations that
 19 inmates had submitted in support of *Quiroz I*. (*Id.* ¶ 49.) Again, it is not clear how this would
 20 demonstrate that Brandon would have a retaliatory motive. In two other paragraphs, in an
 21 attempt to show motive, plaintiff alleges that Brandon approved of the stopping of plaintiff's
 22 mail in June and December 2008. (*Id.* ¶¶ 45, 60.) Plaintiff filed administrative grievances
 23 challenging the stopping of his mail, but there is no evidence that Brandon was aware of the
 24 grievances. The remaining paragraphs in which plaintiff alleges he gave notice to Brandon
 25 include no facts to support the assertion that Brandon knew about plaintiff's protected conduct.
 26 (*Id.* ¶¶ 56, 57, 68.) In addition, there are no facts alleging that McGuyer had notice of plaintiff's
 27 protected conduct. (*Id.* ¶¶ 45, 60.)

28 Regarding the stopping of plaintiff's outgoing mail to Ms. Rodriguez, plaintiff claims

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1 that plaintiff gave McGuyer notice of plaintiff's protected conduct. (*Id.* ¶ 84, citing ¶¶ 69, 70,
 2 73, 76, 80, 81, 83.) However, the court has reviewed the paragraphs to which plaintiff cites as
 3 support for his assertion that McGuyer had notice of plaintiff's protected conduct. None of those
 4 paragraphs demonstrate that McGuyer had knowledge of plaintiff's protected conduct. In
 5 addition, plaintiff does not allege facts to show that McGuyer knew about *Quiroz I*. In two of
 6 the cited paragraphs, plaintiff states that on January 5 and January 29, 2010, McGuyer approved
 7 Pimentel's decision to stop incoming mail to plaintiff, and outgoing mail from plaintiff. (*Id.* ¶¶
 8 73, 81.) However, even though plaintiff challenged these findings by filing administrative
 9 grievances, there is no evidence that McGuyer knew about those grievances. In another
 10 paragraph, plaintiff states that he challenged the loss of several drawings in an administrative
 11 grievance, and at director's level of review, plaintiff alleged that McGuyer was a supervisor who
 12 failed to remedy the problem. (*Id.* ¶ 80.) However, again, this is insufficient to infer that
 13 McGuyer knew about plaintiff's protected conduct, much less was substantially motivated by
 14 that conduct to retaliate.

15 In addition, although retaliatory motive may be shown by the timing of the allegedly
 16 retaliatory act and inconsistency with previous actions, *Bruce*, 351 F.3d at 1288-89, retaliatory
 17 motive is not established simply by showing adverse activity by the defendant after protected
 18 conduct; rather, the plaintiff must show a nexus between the two, *Huskey*, 204 F.3d at 899
 19 (retaliation claim cannot rest on the logical fallacy of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*, i.e., "after this,
 20 therefore because of this"). Here, plaintiff has not met his burden of showing that retaliation was
 21 the "substantial" or "motivating" factor behind Pimentel, McGuyer, or Brandon's actions.
 22 Plaintiff's bare factual assertions that the stopping of his mail was motivated by such reason is
 23 no more than *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*. In other words, plaintiff asserts that because he filed
 24 grievances and litigated lawsuits, the stops must have been retaliatory based upon suspect
 25 timing. Yet, plaintiff has put forth no non-speculative evidence showing a triable issue of fact as
 26 to a causal nexus. For example, he offers no evidence of having personal knowledge, as opposed
 27 to offering speculation, of such a motive. Further, there is no evidence that any of these
 28 defendants expressed opposition to plaintiff's protected conduct. Nor is there evidence tending

1 to show that Pimentel, McGuyer, or Brandon's reasons for stopping or approving of the stopped
 2 mail were false or pretextual.

3 In addition, plaintiff has not shown that these instances of stopped mail chilled the
 4 exercise of his First Amendment right to file grievances or lawsuits. A prisoner must at least
 5 allege that he suffered harm, since harm that is more than minimal will almost always have a
 6 chilling effect. *Rhodes*, 408 F.3d at 567-68 n.11; *see Resnick v. Hayes*, 213 F.3d 443, 449 (9th
 7 Cir. 2000) (holding that a retaliation claim is not actionable unless there is an allegation of
 8 harm). The prisoner need not demonstrate a total chilling of his First Amendment rights in order
 9 to establish a retaliation claim. *See Rhodes*, 408 F.3d at 568-69 (destruction of inmate's property
 10 and assaults on the inmate enough to chill inmate's First Amendment rights and state retaliation
 11 claim, even if inmate filed grievances and a lawsuit). “[T]he proper First Amendment inquiry
 12 asks whether an official's acts would chill or silence a person of ordinary firmness from future
 13 First Amendment activities.” *Id.* at 568.

14 Here, although a court must accept as true all factual allegations contained in a
 15 complaint, a court need not accept a plaintiff's legal conclusions as true. *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678.
 16 Outside of reciting the element that defendants “chilled” plaintiff's First Amendment rights,
 17 plaintiff does not otherwise support this element with any facts. “Threadbare recitals of the
 18 elements of a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements, do not suffice.” *Id.*
 19 Even so, an allegation of harm, rather than a “chilling effect,” may be a sufficient basis for a
 20 claim of retaliation. *Rhodes*, 408 F.3d at 569-70. However, in the three challenged instances of
 21 delayed mail, there is an absence of evidence that plaintiff was harmed. In each instance,
 22 plaintiff promptly contested the stopping of the mail, and on appeal of plaintiff's administrative
 23 grievance, it was determined that plaintiff was correct. Thereafter, plaintiff's mail was
 24 delivered. In a constitutional tort, as in any other, a plaintiff must allege that the defendant's
 25 actions caused him some injury. *See Mt. Healthy City Sch. Dist. Bd. of Educ. v. Doyle*, 429 U.S.
 26 274, 285-87 (1977). Here, despite plaintiff's mail being held for further investigation, it was
 27 ultimately found that the mail should be delivered because the mail did not violate prison
 28 policies. Plaintiff has not provided sufficient evidence that the delay of his mail had a chilling

1 effect on plaintiff's First Amendment activities, or that plaintiff was otherwise harmed.

2 Because there is an absence of evidence regarding causation as well as a chilling effect,
 3 defendants are entitled to summary judgment on these claims.¹¹

4 3. Withholding of prisoner declarations

5 On January 14, 2008, plaintiff requested, and was ultimately granted, approval to receive
 6 approximately 22 declarations from prisoners to use in support of *Quiroz I*. (Third Am. Compl.
 7 ¶ 47.) On April 17, 2008, after having not received three such declarations (from inmates Victor
 8 Acuna, Mike Lerma, and Kenneth Johnson), plaintiff filed an administrative grievance regarding
 9 the undelivered declarations. (*Id.* ¶ 49.) At the first level of review, plaintiff's grievance was
 10 granted with the response that the IGI's office possessed none of the documents. (*Id.* ¶ 50.) On
 11 June 3, 2008, plaintiff wrote to Wilber, informing Wilber that "there was serious problem with
 12 the mailroom" or the IGI's office because inmate Acuna told plaintiff that Acuna had sent
 13 plaintiff the declaration a month prior. (*Id.* ¶ 53.) Plaintiff told Wilber that the IGI's office and
 14 Horel were defendants in *Quiroz I*, and that plaintiff believed that the IGI's office and Horel
 15 were trying to prevent plaintiff from submitting the declarations. (*Id.*) Plaintiff further informed
 16 Wilber that Hernandez told plaintiff that Hernandez recently found a declaration in her desk
 17 from inmate Acuna which had been sent to the IGI's office a month prior. (*Id.*) Plaintiff later
 18 found out that the declaration from inmate Lerma had been confiscated by non-defendant Rice¹²
 19 and Brandon because Lerma had submitted his declaration with a declaration from inmate
 20 Raymond Cazares in support of *Quiroz I*. (*Id.*) The parties do not state whether plaintiff
 21 ultimately received any of the three declarations.

22 Plaintiff claims that Wilber retaliated against plaintiff by screening out the administrative
 23 grievance, and Hernandez and Brandon retaliated against plaintiff by withholding the challenged

25 ¹¹ Defendants also argue that they are entitled to summary judgment on plaintiff's claim that
 26 an unknown defendant discarded two items of mail. (MSJ at 27-28.) However, plaintiff only
 27 names Short as the liable principle defendant regarding these claims. (Third Am. Compl. ¶¶ 80,
 28 83.) The court address these claims in a separate order on Short's motion for summary
 judgment.

¹² Rice was voluntarily dismissed from this case by plaintiff.

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1 declarations. (*Id.*) Plaintiff alleges that defendants did so because of plaintiff's protected
 2 conduct.

3 However, plaintiff has not provided any non-speculative evidence to infer that Hernandez
 4 or Brandon withheld the declarations sent by inmates Acuna, Lerma, or Johnson. Brandon has
 5 submitted a declaration that he was not aware of Lerma's declaration being stopped. (Brandon
 6 Decl. (Reply) ¶ 2.) In support of his statement, Brandon points to a copy of the stopped mail
 7 notification, which indicates that the declaration was stopped because it violated the rule against
 8 inmate-to-inmate one time correspondence. (Pl. Opp., Pl. Decl., Ex. B ("Lerma Decl."), Ex. A;
 9 Docket No. 294 at 23.) The inmate-to-inmate one time correspondence rule allows SHU inmates
 10 to communicate with each other on a one time basis for the limited purpose of communicating
 11 about a court case. (Countess Decl. (Reply) ¶ 3.) The stopped mail notification issued because
 12 the correspondence from Lerma contained an unapproved affidavit from another inmate. (*Id.*)
 13 The evidence demonstrates that the stopped mail notification is signed by non-defendants Rice
 14 and Captain Vanderhoofven, but not by Brandon. (Docket No. 294 at 23.) Brandon declared
 15 that although Brandon was the ISU Captain, the stopped mail was issued by Rice and Captain
 16 Vanderhoofven, who was Acting ISU Captain at that time. (Brandon Decl. (Reply) ¶ 2.)
 17 Plaintiff has not submitted any evidence contradicting this assertion.

18 With respect to Johnson's declaration, Brandon points to a request for interview form
 19 submitted by plaintiff inquiring about Johnson's declaration. (Docket No. 253-1 at 75.) On that
 20 form, non-defendant Correctional Counselor Barnts wrote that Johnson's affidavit was "being
 21 reviewed by IGI" and Barnts indicated that he would "get back to [plaintiff] ASAP." (*Id.*)
 22 However, there is an absence of evidence that either Brandon or Hernandez were the individuals
 23 who withheld Johnson's declaration.

24 With regard to inmate Acuna's declaration, plaintiff submitted an administrative
 25 grievance on April 17, 2008 claiming that Acuna's declaration was not given to plaintiff by IGI
 26 officers. (*Id.* ¶ 49.) However, plaintiff does not submit any admissible evidence such as
 27 personal knowledge as to when, if at all, Acuna actually sent his declaration to plaintiff. *See*
 28 Fed. R. Evid. 602. Further, plaintiff also states that Acuna told plaintiff that Acuna did not send
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1 his declaration until May – after plaintiff filed his initial administrative grievance. (*Id.* ¶ 53.) In
 2 addition, in the administrative grievance, plaintiff did not accuse any specific defendant of
 3 withholding the declaration. In plaintiff’s opposition, plaintiff accuses Hernandez of
 4 purposefully withholding Acuna’s declaration from plaintiff because she was retaliating against
 5 plaintiff for filing an administrative grievance regarding the missing declarations. (Opp. at 17.)
 6 However, there is no evidence to suggest that Hernandez was even aware of plaintiff’s
 7 administrative grievance. Plaintiff alleges that in June 2008, Hernandez informed plaintiff that
 8 she had “just recently” found Acuna’s declaration in her desk. Defendants dispute that
 9 Hernandez made such a statement, but the court accepts as true plaintiff’s allegation for purposes
 10 of defendant’s motion for summary judgment. Even assuming plaintiff’s allegation is
 11 true, there is still an absence of evidence that Hernandez knew that plaintiff filed an April 17,
 12 2008 administrative grievance complaining about the missing declarations and purposefully
 13 withheld Acuna’s declaration from plaintiff.

14 In addition, plaintiff has not provided any evidence of retaliatory motive. Even assuming
 15 that the timing was suspect, neither Hernandez nor Brandon were named in *Quiroz I* as
 16 defendants. There is no plausible evidence to infer that Hernandez or Brandon had illegitimate
 17 reasons to withhold these declarations, much less to retaliate against plaintiff for a lawsuit that
 18 did not involve either of them. Further, there is no evidence that Hernandez or Brandon
 19 expressed opposition to plaintiff’s protected conduct. Plaintiff does not submit specific evidence
 20 to infer that Hernandez’s statement that she “found” Acuna’s declaration or Brandon’s statement
 21 as to why Lerma’s declaration was stopped was false or pretextual. *See Anthoine v. North*
22 Central Counties Consortium, 605 F.3d 740, 753 (9th Cir. 2010) (where plaintiff relies on
 23 circumstantial evidence to show retaliation, that evidence must be specific to defeat the motion
 24 for summary judgment). With respect to Hernandez, plaintiff does not suggest that Hernandez
 25 knew about plaintiff’s protected conduct. Plaintiff merely states that upon asking Hernandez,
 26 Hernandez told plaintiff she had “found” inmate Acuna’s declaration in her desk. (*Id.* ¶ 53.)
 27 This evidence does not purport to provide a nexus for retaliatory motive, nor does it suggest that
 28 Hernandez knew about plaintiff’s protected conduct or purposely withheld declarations for a

1 retaliatory motive. Finally, documentary evidence shows that Brandon did not confiscate
 2 Lerma's declaration, as supported by the stopped mail form which was issued by non-defendants
 3 Rice and Vanderhoofven. Moreover, the decision to stop the mail containing Lerma's
 4 declaration was because the mail containing Lerma's declaration violated the rule against
 5 inmate-to-inmate one time correspondence. Plaintiff provides no contradictory evidence from
 6 which to infer that Brandon withheld Lerma's declaration with any retaliatory intent, much less
 7 because of plaintiff's protected conduct.

8 In short, there is an absence of evidence that Hernandez or Brandon withheld the
 9 declarations or that they did so "because of" plaintiff's protected conduct.

10 Plaintiff claims that Wilber retaliated against plaintiff by improperly screening out
 11 plaintiff's appeal of his administrative grievance, and rejecting plaintiff's attempt to request that
 12 Wilber investigate plaintiff's claims. (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 53.) On May 17, 2008, plaintiff's
 13 administrative grievance regarding the missing declarations was granted at the informal level,
 14 when the response stated that the IGI office had none of plaintiff's legal documents. (Opp. at 9-
 15 10.) Plaintiff appealed the response on May 20, 2008 to Wilber, complaining that four months
 16 prior, plaintiff requested declarations from other inmates but had not yet received any. (*Id.*)
 17 Wilber screened out the appeal of the administrative grievance, and responded that plaintiff's
 18 requested action had previously been granted and no further action was required. (*Id.*) Plaintiff
 19 claims that Wilber screened out this appeal of the administrative grievance because plaintiff filed
 20 *Quiroz I*, and filed the underlying administrative grievance. (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 53.)

21 However, without more, suspect timing is insufficient to lead to a reasonable inference of
 22 retaliatory motive. There is no evidence that Wilber expressed opposition to plaintiff's
 23 administrative grievance or plaintiff's filing of *Quiroz I*. There is also no evidence that Wilber's
 24 decision to screen out the appeal of plaintiff's administrative grievance because plaintiff's
 25 informal level of appeal had already been granted was false or pretextual. (Opp. at 16; Wilber
 26 Decl. (Reply) ¶ 7.) In an attempt to demonstrate retaliatory motive, plaintiff argues that a month
 27 before Wilber screened out the appeal of plaintiff's administrative grievance, Wilber had
 28 submitted a declaration in support of defendants in *Quiroz I*. (Opp. at 17.) Wilber concedes that

1 he did so, however, Wilber explains that as the appeals coordinator at that time, Wilber was also
 2 the custodian of non-health care related administrative appeals of grievances by PBSP inmates.
 3 (Wilber Decl. (Reply) ¶ 2.) As part of his duties, he routinely prepared declarations describing
 4 the status of an inmate's administrative appeals in support of motions to dismiss inmate lawsuits.
 5 (*Id.* ¶¶ 4-5.) Moreover, Wilber asserts that his declaration in *Quiroz I* merely described the
 6 status of three of plaintiff's administrative appeals of plaintiff's grievances. There is no
 7 evidence that Wilber expressed any opinion regarding *Quiroz I* in his declaration, nor is there
 8 any other reason to suggest that Wilber's submission of a declaration in *Quiroz I* would lead to
 9 an inference of a retaliatory motive. Thus, plaintiff has not provided any specific or substantial
 10 evidence to support an inference that Wilber's reason for screening out plaintiff's appeal of the
 11 grievance regarding the declarations from Lerma, Johnson, and Acuna was false or pretextual.
 12 *See Anthoine*, 605 F.3d at 753.

13 Accordingly, defendants are entitled to summary judgment on this claim.

14 4. RVR for requesting dictionary for Alfred

15 Plaintiff claims that on February 12, 2010, Short issued an RVR against plaintiff in
 16 retaliation for plaintiff's protected conduct. The RVR charged plaintiff with promoting gang
 17 activity. It stated that on February 12, 2010, defendant learned that inmate Alfred Sosa, a
 18 validated Mexican Mafia member, received a Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary
 19 which had been purchased by Ms. Gallegos. (Nimrod Decl. ¶ 29, Ex. W at 15.) Short
 20 remembered that, on January 6, 2010, Short had reviewed a letter written by plaintiff to Ms.
 21 Gallegos, giving her the information needed to buy a Random House Unabridged Dictionary for
 22 "Alfred." (*Id.*) The RVR presumed that plaintiff's reference to "Alfred" referred to inmate
 23 Alfred Sosa, a Mexican Mafia gang member. Also, based on a 2005 prison confidential
 24 memorandum, Short knew that Ms. Gallegos was the secretary of Michael DeLia, Sosa's crime
 25 partner. According to the 2005 prison confidential memorandum, DeLia and Sosa assassinated
 26 DeLia's wife for allegedly talking to authorities about the Mexican Mafia gang. Based on that
 27 information, Short issued an RVR to plaintiff for promoting gang activity, in violation of
 28 California Code of Regulations, title 15 § 3023. D. Barneburg approved the issuance of the

1 RVR. Senior Hearing Officer Coulter presided over the disciplinary hearing and found plaintiff
 2 guilty of promoting gang activity.

3 Defendants argue that they are entitled to summary judgment on this claim because there
 4 is an absence of evidence that D. Barneburg and Coulter knew about plaintiff's protected
 5 conduct, and further, that D. Barneburg and Coulter had legitimate reasons for charging and
 6 finding plaintiff guilty of promoting gang activity.

7 To support plaintiff's assertion that circumstantial evidence supports an inference of
 8 retaliatory motive, plaintiff asserts that D. Barneburg and Coulter knew that plaintiff had filed
 9 *Quiroz I*, participated in Sandoval's staff complaint, submitted a declaration in support of
 10 *Sandoval*, and submitted administrative grievances between October 2006 through February
 11 2010. (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 85; Opp. at 27.) Here, there is an inference that D. Barneburg knew
 12 about some of plaintiff's conduct because D. Barneburg was listed as a defendant in *Sandoval*,
 13 and plaintiff participated in both Sandoval's staff complaint in 2007, which is related to
 14 *Sandoval*, and submitted a declaration in *Sandoval*.

15 However, there is no evidence that Coulter knew about plaintiff's protected conduct.
 16 Plaintiff cites to 15 paragraphs within his third amended complaint in an attempt to demonstrate
 17 that Coulter had "notice" of defendants' retaliation and misconduct. (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 85,
 18 citing ¶¶ 45, 49, 54, 56, 57, 60, 68, 69, 70, 73, 76, 80, 81, 83, and 84.) However, with the
 19 exception of one of those paragraphs, the other cited paragraphs do not even mention Coulter.
 20 As to the one paragraph that mentions Coulter, plaintiff merely alleges that on November 29,
 21 2009, Coulter allowed inmate Frank Fernandez to make a phone call regarding the death of
 22 Fernandez's father. (*Id.* ¶ 73.) In sum, the paragraphs to which plaintiff cites do not provide
 23 evidence that Coulter knew about plaintiff's protected conduct. Without such evidence,
 24 plaintiff's claim against Coulter cannot survive summary judgment. *See Corales*, 567 F.3d at
 25 568 ("a plaintiff creates a genuine issue of material fact on the question of retaliatory motive
 26 when he or she produces, *in addition to evidence that the defendant knew of the protected
 27 speech*, at least (1) evidence of proximity in time between the protected speech and the allegedly
 28 retaliatory decision, (2) evidence that the defendant expressed opposition to the speech or (3)

1 evidence that the defendant's proffered reason for the adverse action was false or pretextual.”)
 2 (italics in original) (internal quotation marks omitted).

3 As to D. Barneburg, in addition to knowledge of protected conduct, plaintiff must
 4 provide evidence that supports an inference of retaliatory motive. Based on the record, the court
 5 finds that a reasonable inference can be made that D. Barneburg's decision to approve the
 6 issuance of the RVR because it promoted gang activity is false or pretextual. The RVR stated
 7 that plaintiff asked Ms. Gallegos to purchase a particular dictionary for inmate Sosa, who is also
 8 a Mexican Mafia member. Based on such evidence, in addition to a 2005 prison confidential
 9 memorandum indicating that Ms. Gallegos was the secretary of Sosa's crime partner, Short
 10 issued, and D. Barneburg approved, an RVR for promoting gang activity in violation of
 11 California Code of Regulations, title 15 § 3023.¹³

12 However, the undisputed evidence shows that the substance of plaintiff's letter concerns
 13 the request to buy a new dictionary for someone named Alfred. (Docket No. 254, Ex. 31.)
 14 Defendants do not allege, nor is there evidence demonstrating, that the letter contained coded or
 15 gang-related messages. In fact, defendants does not assert how plaintiff's request to Ms.
 16 Gallegos to purchase a new dictionary for another inmate, who is also a gang member, promotes,
 17 furthers, or assists a gang in violation of Section 3023. In short, defendants do not attempt to
 18 explain how plaintiff's request to purchase a new dictionary for Alfred knowingly promoted
 19 gang activity or was a threat to prison security.

20 Moreover, an RVR is issued for a serious rules violation. The California Code of
 21 Regulations gives a non-exhaustive list of examples of serious rules violations to include such

23 ¹³ Section 3023 provides: “(a) Inmates and parolees shall not knowingly promote, further or
 24 assist any gang as defined in section 3000. (b) Gangs, as defined in section 3000, present a
 25 serious threat to the safety and security of California prisons.” 15 Cal. Code Regs. § 3023
 26 (2010). Section 3000 defines “gang” as, “Gang means any ongoing formal or informal
 27 organization, association or group of three or more persons which has a common name or
 28 identifying sign or symbol whose members and/or associates, individually or collectively,
 engage or have engaged, on behalf of that organization, association or group, in two or more acts
 which include, planning, organizing threatening, financing, soliciting, or committing unlawful
 acts or acts of misconduct classified as serious pursuant to section 3315.” Cal. Code Regs., tit.
 15, § 3000.

1 circumstances as: use of force or violence against another person, a breach of or hazard to
 2 facility security, a serious disruption of facility operations, manufacturing a controlled substance,
 3 and willfully inciting others to commit an act of force or violence. *See* Cal. Code Regs., tit. 15, §
 4 3015. Here, there is an absence of evidence showing how plaintiff's letter requesting the buying
 5 of a new dictionary for another inmate reaches the level of a serious rule violation. Indeed, at the
 6 conclusion of the disciplinary hearing, Coulter admitted that "this offense is not explicitly listed
 7 [as a serious rule violation] under CCR 3315 as a serious offense" but then justified the guilty
 8 finding because promoting gang activity represents a serious threat to prison security. (Nimrod
 9 Decl., Ex. W.)

10 Here, the disconnect between the issuance of, and the stated reasons for, the RVR and the
 11 offending letter leads to a reasonable inference that those reasons are pretextual.

12 Defendants also argue that there was a legitimate penological goal for issuing the RVR,
 13 i.e., it is clear that prisons have a legitimate penological interest in stopping prison gang activity.
 14 *See Bruce*, 351 F.3d at 1289. However, the Ninth Circuit has cautioned that "prison officials
 15 may not defeat a retaliation claim on summary judgment simply by articulating a general
 16 justification for a neutral process, when there is a genuine issue of material fact as to whether the
 17 action was taken in retaliation for the exercise of a constitutional right." *Id.* Here, because there
 18 is a genuine issue of material fact as to retaliatory motive, defendants cannot rely on the prison's
 19 legitimate penological interest in prison security to succeed on their motion for summary
 20 judgment. Moreover, based on the absence of evidence supporting the issuance of the RVR for
 21 promoting gang activity, the court finds that there is also a genuine issue of material fact as to
 22 whether the issuance of the RVR reasonably advanced a legitimate penological goal.

23 Viewing the evidence in the light most favorable to plaintiff, based on the inference that
 24 the reason for issuing the RVR was pretextual, and the inference that the issuance of the RVR
 25 did not reasonably advance a legitimate penological goal, the court finds that there are genuine
 26 issues of material fact regarding whether D. Barneburg retaliated against plaintiff. However,
 27 because there is an absence of evidence that Coulter knew about protected conduct, there is
 28 necessarily an absence of evidence that Coulter harbored a retaliatory motive. Thus, summary

1 judgment is granted on this retaliation claim as to Coulter.

2 Alternatively, defendants argues that D. Barneburg is entitled to qualified immunity. The
 3 defense of qualified immunity protects “government officials . . . from liability for civil damages
 4 insofar as their conduct does not violate clearly established statutory or constitutional rights of
 5 which a reasonable person would have known.” *Harlow v. Fitzgerald*, 457 U.S. 800, 818
 6 (1982). A court considering a claim of qualified immunity must determine whether the plaintiff
 7 has alleged the deprivation of an actual constitutional right and whether such right was clearly
 8 established such that it would be clear to a reasonable officer that his conduct was unlawful in
 9 the situation he confronted. *See Pearson v. Callahan*, 555 U.S. 223, 236 (2009). “[U]nder either
 10 prong, courts may not resolve genuine disputes of fact in favor of the party seeking summary
 11 judgment,” and must, as in other cases, view the evidence in the light most favorable to the non-
 12 movant. *Tolan v. Cotton*, 134 S. Ct. 1861, 1866 (2014) (per curiam).

13 Viewing the evidence in the light most favorable to plaintiff, D. Barneburg is not entitled
 14 to qualified immunity. Here, it would have been clear to D. Barneburg that approving the
 15 issuance of an RVR in retaliation for plaintiff’s protected conduct would violate the law.
 16 Accordingly, D. Barneburg is not entitled to qualified immunity.

17 5. Failure to notify plaintiff of trust seizure

18 On July 8, 2010, Superior Court Judge Ransom issued a court order for seizure of
 19 approximately \$91,000 from inmate accounts, including \$276.63 from plaintiff’s account.
 20 (Third Am. Compl. ¶¶ 90-91.) Plaintiff alleges that D. Barneburg, IGI Correctional Officer
 21 Milligan, and non-defendant IGI Supervisor Hawkes¹⁴ conspired and retaliated against plaintiff
 22 by not informing him about the court’s order and not giving him a receipt. (*Id.* ¶¶ 91, 94.) D.
 23 Barneburg typed receipts for the other 35 inmates, but not for plaintiff. Hawkes and Milligan
 24 further personally informed all other 35 inmates and gave them receipts informing them of the
 25 court order, but did not inform plaintiff or provide him with a receipt. On July 17, 2010, plaintiff
 26 tried to buy commissary, but was informed that plaintiff had no money in his account. (*Id.* ¶ 92;

27
 28 ¹⁴ Hawkes was voluntarily dismissed from this case by plaintiff.

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1 Opp. at 30.) Plaintiff filed an administrative grievance claiming an illegal seizure of funds.
 2 (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 93.) Plaintiff alleges that D. Barneburg and Milligan intentionally failed to
 3 inform plaintiff about the seizure of funds from plaintiff's account in retaliation against
 4 plaintiff's protected conduct.

5 First, plaintiff does not allege that Milligan was aware of plaintiff's protected conduct.
 6 Thus, there is no causal connection between Milligan's omission and plaintiff's protected
 7 conduct. Second, plaintiff states that D. Barneburg "had notice" of "retaliation and misconduct"
 8 and cites to paragraphs within his third amended complaint as support. (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 94,
 9 citing ¶¶ 45, 54, 56, 57, 60, 68, 69, 70, 73, 76, 80, 81, 83, 84, 85.) However, the court has
 10 reviewed the paragraphs to which plaintiff cites as support for his assertion that D. Barneburg
 11 had notice of plaintiff's protected conduct. In all but two of those paragraphs, D. Barneburg was
 12 not even mentioned. In one paragraph, however, plaintiff asserts that D. Barneburg knew that
 13 plaintiff filed a grievance because D. Barneburg was the second level reviewer in plaintiff's staff
 14 complaint against Short. (*Id.* ¶ 76.) However, in that grievance, D. Barneburg ultimately agreed
 15 with plaintiff and determined that in fact, Short violated CDCR policy. (*Id.*) Although D.
 16 Barneburg clearly knew in that instance that plaintiff had filed a grievance, it is not sufficiently
 17 clear how a reasonable inference can be made that D. Barneburg had some sort of retaliatory
 18 motive against plaintiff as a result. Plaintiff alleges that D. Barneburg also had notice of
 19 plaintiff's protected conduct with respect to the RVR that Sgt. Short issued against plaintiff
 20 regarding the purchase of a dictionary for inmate Sosa. (*Id.* ¶ 85.) However, that D. Barneburg
 21 approved the issuance of the RVR does not show that D. Barneburg then knew that plaintiff
 22 challenged the RVR in a subsequent administrative grievance.

23 Moreover, even assuming that the circumstantial evidence showed suspect timing,
 24 plaintiff would need more specific evidence to provide a reasonable inference that plaintiff's
 25 protected conduct was a substantial or motivating factor for defendants' actions. Here, there is
 26 no evidence that D. Barneburg or Milligan had expressed opposition to plaintiff's protected
 27 conduct. Moreover, plaintiff does not provide any specific evidence to show that D. Barneburg's
 28 explanation that his failure to type a receipt for plaintiff was inadvertent was false or pretextual.

1 *See Anthoine*, 605 F.3d at 753. In other words, plaintiff fails to provide a sufficient or plausible
 2 link of causation that defendants' actions or omissions were motivated by plaintiff's protected
 3 conduct. *See Wood*, 753 F.3d at 904.

4 Accordingly, defendants' motion for summary judgment is granted on this claim.

5 6. Cell search

6 On December 16, 2011, Frisk became aware of the incoming mail from Burke, Williams,
 7 & Sorenson and that the mail contained documents about Short's In-Service Training Records,
 8 Employee Positional history, and Post Order or Duty Statement. (Docket No. 138, Frisk Decl. ¶¶
 9 7-8.) As a result, incoming mail was stopped and the documents destroyed. Plaintiff was not
 10 permitted to possess these documents because the documents included information that could be
 11 used by inmates to disrupt the prison. (*Id.* ¶ 8.) Frisk declares that, upon learning of attempted
 12 prohibited documents, he became concerned that plaintiff might possess additional confidential
 13 information, so Frisk ordered IGI Correctional Officers Bassett, Healy, Gongora, and Pimentel to
 14 assist Frisk in searching plaintiff's cell. (*Id.* ¶ 11.) When Frisk, Bassett, Healy, Gongora, and
 15 Pimentel arrived, plaintiff told them he had a court deadline date, and Bassett replied "we know
 16 but we are here to search your cell." (Third Am. Compl. ¶ 102.) After the search, plaintiff
 17 discovered that all of his paperwork had been confiscated. (*Id.* ¶¶ 102, 103, 108; Frisk Decl. ¶¶
 18 15-18.) At that time, Frisk also informed plaintiff of the disallowed, and subsequently destroyed,
 19 mail from Burke, Williams, & Sorenson, the law firm who is representing Short in this
 20 underlying federal action. (Frisk Decl. ¶ 18.) As previously stated, the mail included two
 21 confidential CDCR documents. Specifically, the "Post Order" or "Duty Statement" for Short
 22 included information that could be used by an inmate to disrupt the prison, such as the
 23 procedures for how and when IGI Sergeants respond to institution alarms. Such information
 24 could be used by an inmate to disrupt the prison, which "would jeopardize the safety and
 25 security of the institution." The second document was Short's work history which included
 26 personal information about Short. After reviewing all of plaintiff's confiscated paperwork from
 27 the cell search, and finding no contraband except for excess books, magazines and trash, the
 28 remainder of plaintiff's property was returned on December 22, 2011, one day after plaintiff's

1 court deadline. (Frisk Decl. ¶ 16; Third Am. Compl. ¶ 107.)

2 Plaintiff alleges that Frisk, Bassett, Healy, Gongora and Pimentel conspired and retaliated
 3 when they searched plaintiff's cell and confiscated all of plaintiff's legal paperwork. Plaintiff
 4 points out that defendants filed a motion to dismiss in the underlying action on November 21,
 5 2011.¹⁵ (Docket No. 105.) On December 9, 2011, plaintiff filed a motion to extend the deadline
 6 to file his opposition from December 21, 2011 to March 20, 2012. (Docket No. 115.) On
 7 December 16, 2011, after defendant Frisk learned about the incoming mail from Burke,
 8 Williams, & Sorenson containing confidential documents, Frisk, Bassett, Healy, Gongora, and
 9 Pimentel searched plaintiff's cell and confiscated all of plaintiff's paperwork for submission to
 10 the IGI office for investigation. After the investigation, all of plaintiff's paperwork except for
 11 the prohibited excess books, magazines and trash was returned to plaintiff on December 22,
 12 2011, one day after plaintiff's court deadline.

13 Viewing the evidence in the light most favorable to plaintiff, at the time Frisk ordered the
 14 cell search, he and the other defendants present for the search knew about plaintiff's lawsuit
 15 prior to the search as evidenced by Bassett's acknowledgment to plaintiff that "we know [about
 16 your court deadline] but we are here to search your cell." Moreover, the timing of the cell search
 17 is certainly suspect. In addition, according to plaintiff, defendants knew that plaintiff had an
 18 impending court deadline and purposely retained his paperwork until the day after the deadline
 19 had passed. Finally, plaintiff suggests that Frisk's stated reason for ordering the cell search, i.e.,
 20 because Frisk was concerned that plaintiff might have more confidential documents in his cell,
 21 was false because in response to plaintiff's administrative grievance, the second level of review
 22 response indicated that plaintiff's cell search was "based on a current investigation on [plaintiff]
 23 and other EME members and associates." (Opp., Pl. Decl., Ex. G-1.)

24 There is no question that routine cell searches conducted for the purpose of preserving
 25 institutional order, discipline, and security further those legitimate penological goals. *See*

27 ¹⁵ This motion to dismiss was filed by the California Attorney General's office on behalf of
 28 all defendants except for Short, who did not join in the motion and is separately represented by
 Burke, Williams, & Sorenson.

1 *Hudson v. Palmer*, 468 U.S. 517, 529 (1984) (“Random searches of inmates, individually or
 2 collectively, and their cells and lockers are valid and necessary to ensure the security of the
 3 institution and the safety of inmates and all others within its boundaries”). Frisk submitted
 4 evidence that based on the mail from Burke, Williams, & Sorenson which contained documents
 5 that plaintiff was not allowed to possess for the security of the institution, Frisk was concerned
 6 that plaintiff may have had additional prohibited documents in plaintiff’s possession. However,
 7 based on the different reasons given by the second level of review and Frisk for the cell search
 8 and confiscation of paperwork, a reasonable inference can be made that the reasons are false or
 9 pretextual.

10 In addition, a reasonable inference can be made that the retention of plaintiff’s paperwork
 11 until one day after plaintiff’s court deadline was made for a retaliatory purpose. Viewing the
 12 evidence in the light most favorable to plaintiff, plaintiff alleges that on the day of plaintiff’s
 13 court deadline, a prison librarian called the IGI unit and left a message that plaintiff needed his
 14 legal property returned. (Opp. at 41.) Although defendants argue that plaintiff was not harmed
 15 by missing the court deadline because on January 6, 2012, plaintiff received an extension of time
 16 to March 20, 2012, to file his opposition to defendants’ motion to dismiss, plaintiff need only
 17 demonstrate that his First Amendment rights were chilled, though not necessarily silenced. *See*
 18 *Rhodes*, 408 F.3d at 568-69. Whether plaintiff was ultimately harmed is not the appropriate test.
 19 At the time that defendants held onto plaintiff’s paperwork, neither plaintiff nor defendants knew
 20 whether the court would grant plaintiff’s extension of his deadline. Finally, defendants do not
 21 set forth any evidence that “but for” any retaliatory motive, they still would have retained
 22 plaintiff’s paperwork until December 22, 2011. *See Allen v. Scribner*, 812 F.2d 426, 436 (9th
 23 Cir.) (recognizing that motivation generally presents a jury question), *amended by* 828 F.2d 1445
 24 (9th Cir. 1987).

25 The court finds that there is a genuine issue of material fact as to whether defendants
 26 harbored a retaliatory motive. Accordingly, defendants are not entitled to summary judgment on
 27 this claim.

28 For similar reasons, defendants are also not entitled to qualified immunity. It is clearly

1 established that retaliating against a prisoner for his use of the prison grievance system and for
 2 litigating violates a prisoner's constitutional rights. *See Rhodes*, 408 F.3d at 567; *Pratt*, 65 F.3d
 3 at 806 (stating the "prohibition against retaliatory punishment is "clearly established law" in the
 4 Ninth Circuit, for qualified immunity purposes"). Viewing the evidence in the light most
 5 favorable to plaintiff, it would have been clear to a reasonable prison official that conducting a
 6 cell search, confiscating plaintiff's paperwork, and retaining plaintiff's paperwork until after
 7 plaintiff misses a court deadline in retaliation for plaintiff's protected conduct violated the law.

8 Accordingly, defendants are not entitled to qualified immunity.

9 B. Conspiracy

10 A civil conspiracy is a combination of two or more persons who, by some concerted
 11 action, intend to accomplish some unlawful objective for the purpose of harming another which
 12 results in damage. *Gilbrook v. City of Westminster*, 177 F.3d 839, 856 (9th Cir. 1999). To prove
 13 a civil conspiracy, the plaintiff must show that the conspiring parties reached a unity of purpose
 14 or common design and understanding, or a meeting of the minds in an unlawful agreement. *Id.*
 15 To be liable, each participant in the conspiracy need not know the exact details of the plan, but
 16 each participant must at least share the common objective of the conspiracy. *Id.* A defendant's
 17 knowledge of and participation in a conspiracy may be inferred from circumstantial evidence and
 18 from evidence of the defendant's actions. *Id.* at 856-57.

19 Conclusory allegations of conspiracy are not enough to support a § 1983 conspiracy
 20 claim. *Burns v. County of King*, 883 F.2d 819, 821 (9th Cir. 1989) (per curiam). Although an
 21 "agreement or meeting of minds to violate [the plaintiff's] constitutional rights must be shown,"
 22 *Woodrum v. Woodward County*, 866 F.2d 1121, 1126 (9th Cir. 1989), "[d]irect evidence of
 23 improper motive or an agreement to violate a plaintiff's constitutional rights will only rarely be
 24 available. Instead, it will almost always be necessary to infer such agreements from
 25 circumstantial evidence or the existence of joint action." *Mendocino Environmental Center v.*
 26 *Mendocino County*, 192 F.3d 1283, 1302 (9th Cir. 1999). Thus, "an agreement need not be overt,
 27 and may be inferred on the basis of circumstantial evidence such as the actions of the
 28 defendants." *Id.* at 1301.

1 Fatal to most of plaintiff's conspiracy claims is that the court has found that there is no
 2 underlying constitutional violation for plaintiff's claims of retaliation, with the exception of the
 3 cell search and the RVR. As the Ninth Circuit has held, “[c]onspiracy is not itself a
 4 constitutional tort under § 1983,” and it “does not enlarge the nature of the claims asserted by the
 5 plaintiff, as there must always be an underlying constitutional violation.” *Lacey v. Maricopa*
 6 *Cnty.*, 693 F.3d 896, 935 (9th Cir. 2012) (en banc). The court’s finding that there is no
 7 constitutional violation for the retaliation claims, except for the cell search and the RVR,
 8 therefore necessarily means that there is no viable claim for conspiracy. *Id.*; *Avalos v. Baca*, 596
 9 F.3d 583, 592 (9th Cir. 2010) (“To support a claim of a conspiracy under § 1983, [p]laintiff’s
 10 [c]omplaint must contain sufficient factual matter to show (1) the existence of an express or
 11 implied agreement among the defendant officers to deprive him of his constitutional rights, and
 12 (2) an actual deprivation of those rights resulting from that agreement.”). Therefore, plaintiff’s
 13 conspiracy claims as to all the retaliation claims except for the cell search and the RVR fail as a
 14 matter of law, and defendants are entitled to summary judgment.

15 With respect to plaintiff’s claims that Frisk, Bassett, Healy, Gongona and Pimentel
 16 conspired to retaliate against plaintiff by conducting the cell search, confiscating all of plaintiff’s
 17 paperwork, and retaining that paperwork until after plaintiff’s court deadline had passed, plaintiff
 18 concedes that he does not have firsthand knowledge of an agreement among the defendants.
 19 (Opp. at 46.) Nonetheless, plaintiff asserts that he has alleged sufficient evidence that
 20 defendants had a “meeting of the minds to deprive [plaintiff] of his rights by conspiring and
 21 demonstrating a collaborative mindset.” (*Id.*)

22 The court agrees. “Whether defendants were involved in an unlawful conspiracy is
 23 generally a factual issue and should be resolved by the jury, so long as there is a possibility that
 24 the jury can infer from the circumstances (that the alleged conspirators) had a meeting of the
 25 minds and thus reached a[n] understanding to achieve the conspiracy’s objectives.” *Mendocino*
 26 *Environmental Center*, 192 F.3d at 1301-02 (internal quotation marks and citation omitted).
 27 Having concluded that there is a genuine issue of material fact regarding defendants’ retaliatory
 28 motive in searching plaintiff’s cell, confiscating his paperwork, and retaining that paperwork

1 until after plaintiff's court deadline passed, there is at least a reasonable inference of an implicit
 2 agreement among Frisk, Bassett, Healy, Gongona, and Pimentel to retaliate against plaintiff.

3 Plaintiff also claims that Short, D. Barneburg, and Coulter conspired with each other to
 4 issue the RVR and find plaintiff guilty of promoting gang activity in retaliation for plaintiff's
 5 protected conduct. Viewing the evidence in the light most favorable to plaintiff, based on the
 6 inference that D. Barneburg harbored a retaliatory motive and the inference that the issuance of
 7 the RVR did not reasonably advance a legitimate penological goal, the court finds that there is a
 8 reasonable inference that Short, D. Barneburg, and Coulter reached an agreement to retaliate
 9 against plaintiff. Although there is an absence of evidence that Coulter knew about plaintiff's
 10 protected conduct and thus an absence of evidence that Coulter harbored a retaliatory motive,
 11 such a finding does not preclude the finding that there is a genuine issue of material dispute that
 12 Coulter was involved in a conspiracy to retaliate. *See Lacey*, 693 F.3d at 935 ("Conspiracy may,
 13 however, enlarge the pool of responsible defendants . . . ; the fact of the conspiracy may make a
 14 party liable for the unconstitutional actions of the party with whom he has conspired.");
 15 *Gilbrook*, 177 F.3d at 856-88 (recognizing that an allegation of conspiracy can be used to prove
 16 claims against defendants who need not know the exact details of the plan, but must share the
 17 common objective of the conspiracy and who are less directly involved in the underlying
 18 constitutional violation). Moreover, the evidence suggests that the acts of issuing the RVR and
 19 finding plaintiff guilty were "unlikely to have [occurred] without an agreement." *Mendocino*
 20 *Environmental Center*, 192 F.3d at 1302. Thus, the court finds that there is a possibility that the
 21 jury can infer from the circumstances that the alleged conspirators agreed to achieve the
 22 conspiracy's objectives.

23 Accordingly, defendants' motion for summary judgment on plaintiff's claim that Frisk,
 24 Bassett, Healy, Gongona, and Pimentel conspired to retaliate against him is DENIED.
 25 Defendants' motion for summary judgment on plaintiff's claim that D. Barneburg and Coulter
 26 conspired to retaliate against him is DENIED. Defendants' motion for summary judgment on
 27 plaintiff's remaining conspiracy claims is GRANTED.

1 C. Supervisory liability

2 A supervisor may be liable under section 1983 upon a showing of (1) personal
 3 involvement in the constitutional deprivation or (2) a sufficient causal connection between the
 4 supervisor's wrongful conduct and the constitutional violation. *Henry A. v. Willden*, 678 F.3d
 5 991, 1003-04 (9th Cir. 2012). It is insufficient for a plaintiff only to allege that supervisors knew
 6 about the constitutional violation and that they generally created policies and procedures that led
 7 to the violation, without alleging "a specific policy" or "a specific event" instigated by them that
 8 led to the constitutional violations. *Hydrick v. Hunter*, 669 F.3d 937, 942 (9th Cir. 2012). A
 9 plaintiff must also show that the supervisor had the requisite state of mind to establish liability,
 10 which turns on the requirement of the particular claim – and, more specifically, on the state of
 11 mind required by the particular claim – not on a generally applicable concept of supervisory
 12 liability. *Oregon State University Student Alliance v. Ray*, 699 F.3d 1053, 1071 (9th Cir. 2012).
 13 Here, the requisite state of mind is one of deliberate indifference. *See id.* at 1074-75 & n.18.

14 With respect to the retaliation claims upon which the court has granted summary judgment
 15 to defendants, the court has already determined that plaintiff has not demonstrated a genuine issue
 16 of material fact regarding defendants' personal involvement. Moreover, plaintiff does not set
 17 forth any evidence to support a theory of a causal connection between those defendants' specific
 18 conduct and the constitutional violations. In addition, plaintiff does not provide any non-
 19 conclusory evidence that those defendants created a specific policy or procedure that led to any
 20 retaliation, *see Hydrick*, 669 F.3d at 942, or that defendants acted with deliberate indifference.

21 In addition, there is an absence of evidence as to defendants' supervisory liability for the
 22 claims on which the court has granted summary judgment. Plaintiff has submitted several inmate
 23 declarations in support of his opposition to defendants' motion for summary judgment. (Docket
 24 Nos. 279, 280, 281, 282, 284.) In general, these inmate declarations unanimously opine that IGI
 25 officers harass inmates by interfering with inmates' incoming and outgoing mail. The
 26 declarations also intimate that IGI officers have an unofficial policy of intimidating inmates.
 27 However, the declarations do not name any supervisory defendants liable for creating or
 28 implementing this unofficial policy. *See Redman v. County of San Diego*, 942 F.2d 1435, 1446

1 (9th Cir. 1991) (en banc). Nor do the declarations provide non-speculative evidence that the
 2 supervisory defendants named in this action knowingly acquiesced to such a policy. *See Oregon*
 3 *State University Student Alliance*, 699 F.3d at 1071.

4 In fact, plaintiff makes a blanket assertion that the supervisory defendants were the
 5 supervisors of specific individual defendants who allegedly violated plaintiff's constitutional
 6 rights. (Opp. at 50-51.) These allegations are conclusory and not supported by sufficient factual
 7 content that would allow them to meet the pleading standard articulated in *Iqbal*. *Compare Starr*
 8 *v. Baca*, 652 F.3d 1202, 1216-17 (9th Cir. 2011) (reversing dismissal of claim against supervisor
 9 defendant sued in his official capacity for an attack against an inmate involving prison deputies,
 10 where plaintiff made "detailed factual allegations that go well beyond reciting the elements of a
 11 claim of deliberate indifference") *with Hydrick v. Hunter*, 669 F.3d 937, 941-42 (9th Cir. 2012)
 12 (dismissing Section 1983 claim against supervisors in their individual capacities where "instead
 13 of the detailed factual allegations in *Starr* . . . plaintiffs' complaint is based on conclusory
 14 allegations and generalities, without any allegation of the specific wrong-doing by each
 15 defendant").

16 On the other hand, plaintiff has submitted sufficient evidence to defeat summary judgment
 17 as to Frisk, who was the supervising IGI officer of Pimentel, Bassett, Healy, and Gongora,
 18 regarding Frisk's supervisory liability as to plaintiff's claim that defendants retaliated against him
 19 by searching his cell, confiscating his paperwork, and retaining his paperwork until after
 20 plaintiff's court deadline had passed. Plaintiff has also submitted sufficient evidence to defeat
 21 summary judgment as to D. Barneburg, who was the supervising IGI officer of Short, regarding
 22 D. Barneburg's supervisory liability as to plaintiff's claim that defendants retaliated against
 23 plaintiff by issuing the RVR. Plaintiff has shown a genuine issue of material fact as to Frisk and
 24 D. Barneburg's personal involvement as well as a causal connection between their conduct and
 25 the constitutional violation. *Henry A. v. Willden*, 678 F.3d 991, 1003-04 (9th Cir. 2012).

26 Accordingly, with the exception of Frisk and D. Barneburg, defendants are entitled to
 27 summary judgment with respect to plaintiff's allegation that they are liable as supervisors.
 28

1 D. State law claims

2 Plaintiff asserts a variety of state law violations. The court exercised supplemental
 3 jurisdiction over them. Before a state law claim can be brought, whether in state or federal court,
 4 the California Tort Claims Act (“CTCA”) requires that the claim be presented to the Victim
 5 Compensation and Government Claims Board. *See Cal. Govt. Code §§ 911.2, 945.4; Hernandez*
 6 *v. McClanahan*, 996 F. Supp. 975, 977 (N.D. Cal. 1998) (recognizing that the failure to present
 7 timely California tort claims bars plaintiff from bringing them in federal suit).

8 Defendants first assert that plaintiff did not comply with the CTCA, Cal. Govt. Code §
 9 945.6(a), because plaintiff failed to submit his federal civil rights complaint within six months of
 10 the denial of the state’s rejection of plaintiff’s claim. Here, plaintiff’s state claims were rejected
 11 on June 17, 2010, and notice of the rejection was mailed to plaintiff on June 24, 2010. The
 12 parties agree that plaintiff’s federal civil rights complaint was due to be mailed no later than
 13 December 24, 2010. Plaintiff declares that he mailed his federal civil rights complaint by turning
 14 it in to Officer Reich for mailing on December 23, 2010. Thus, the court finds that plaintiff has
 15 complied with the CTCA by filing his civil suit within six months of rejection of his claim,
 16 pursuant to Cal. Govt. Code § 945.6(a).

17 Defendants also assert that plaintiff has failed to comply with the CTCA because he failed
 18 to present them to the Claims Board more than six months after several of the causes of action
 19 accrued. *See Cal. Govt. Code § 911.2*. In plaintiff’s tort claim form, submitted on May 9, 2010,
 20 plaintiff claims that the incidents at issue occurred from 2005 through April 25, 2010. Thus,
 21 argue defendants, any of plaintiff’s claims that accrued before November 9, 2009 do not comply
 22 with Cal. Govt. Code § 911.2, and are thus untimely. Plaintiff does not address this argument.
 23 Based on a review of the record, the court finds that plaintiff’s state law claims, which accrued
 24 before November 9, 2009, are untimely.

25 Finally, defendants argue that plaintiff’s state law claims fail to state a claim because they
 26 do not state facts sufficient to establish the elements of each cause of action. However,
 27 defendants rely on California’s fact pleading standard, which requires more detail than the federal
 28 notice pleading standard. *See Back v. County of Butte*, 147 Cal. App. 3d 554, 561 (1983) (“The

1 rules of pleading in federal court are generally different from the rules of pleading in California
 2 state courts, since the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure recognize a form of “notice pleading,”
 3 usually designed simply to put a defendant on notice of the nature of a claim, whereas California
 4 requires the pleading of facts.”); *cf. Nagrampa v. MailCoups, Inc.*, 469 F.3d 1257, 1265 n.2 (9th
 5 Cir. 2006) (distinguishing between California’s requirement that the claim “denote[s] the
 6 aggregate of operative facts which give rise to a right enforceable in the courts[]” and federal
 7 notice pleading standard pursuant to Rule 8(a)) (citation omitted). Indeed, plaintiff responds that
 8 the facts related to his state law claims are identical to those stated in his federal law claims and
 9 presented in his third amended complaint. As such, the court finds that defendants were fairly put
 10 on notice under the applicable liberal notice pleading standard set forth in Federal Rule of Civil
 11 Procedure 8(a). *See, e.g., Jones v. Tozzi*, No. 05-CV-0148 OWW DLB, 2006 WL 1582311, at
 12 *15 (E.D. Cal. June 2, 2006) (permitting a supplemental state law claim to satisfy the federal
 13 notice pleading standard); *Clement v. America Greetings Corp.*, 636 F. Supp. 1326, 1328 (S.D.
 14 Cal. 1986) (“The manner and details of pleading in the federal court are governed by the Federal
 15 Rules of Civil Procedure regardless of the substantive law to be applied in the particular action.”).

16 Accordingly, defendants’ motion for summary judgment as to plaintiff’s state law claims
 17 that accrued before November 9, 2009, is granted because those claims are untimely.
 18 Defendants’ motion for summary judgment as to plaintiff’s remaining state law claims are denied.

19 **V. Referral to Settlement Proceedings**

20 In the court’s order granting in part and denying in part defendant Short’s motion for
 21 summary judgment, the court appointed counsel to represent plaintiff for the remainder of this
 22 case. The appointment shall include representation with respect to the remaining claims set forth
 23 above. In addition, the court finds good cause to refer this matter to Magistrate Judge Nathanael
 24 Cousins for settlement proceedings. The proceedings will consist of one or more conferences as
 25 determined by Judge Cousins. If these settlement proceedings do not resolve this matter, the
 26 court will then set this matter for trial.

27 **CONCLUSION**

28 1. Plaintiff’s claims regarding events that occurred prior to 2007 are voluntarily

Order Granting in Part and Denying in Part Defendants’ Motion for Summary Judgment; Referring Case to
 Settlement Proceedings

1 dismissed. Those claims are dismissed without prejudice. Defendants' motion for summary
2 judgment is DENIED in part and GRANTED in part. Summary judgment is DENIED as to
3 plaintiff's claims of: (1) retaliation for searching plaintiff's cell, confiscating his paperwork, and
4 retaining them until after plaintiff's court deadline had passed; (2) conspiracy to retaliate for the
5 same; (3) retaliation for issuing and approving an RVR; (4) conspiracy to retaliate by approving
6 an RVR and finding plaintiff guilty; and (5) plaintiff's state law claims accruing after November
7 9, 2009. Summary judgment is GRANTED as to the remaining claims.

8 2. The instant case is REFERRED to Judge Cousins for settlement proceedings on
9 the remaining claims in this action, as described above, within **ninety (90) days** of the date
10 counsel is located and appointed for plaintiff. Judge Cousins shall coordinate a time and date for
11 a settlement conference with all interested parties or their representatives.

12 3. The instant case is STAYED pending the result of the settlement conference
13 proceedings. The clerk shall ADMINISTRATIVELY CLOSE this case file until further order of
14 the court.

15 IT IS SO ORDERED.

16 DATED: March 31, 2015



LUCY H. KOH
United States District Judge